May 29, 1995

THE NEW YORKER

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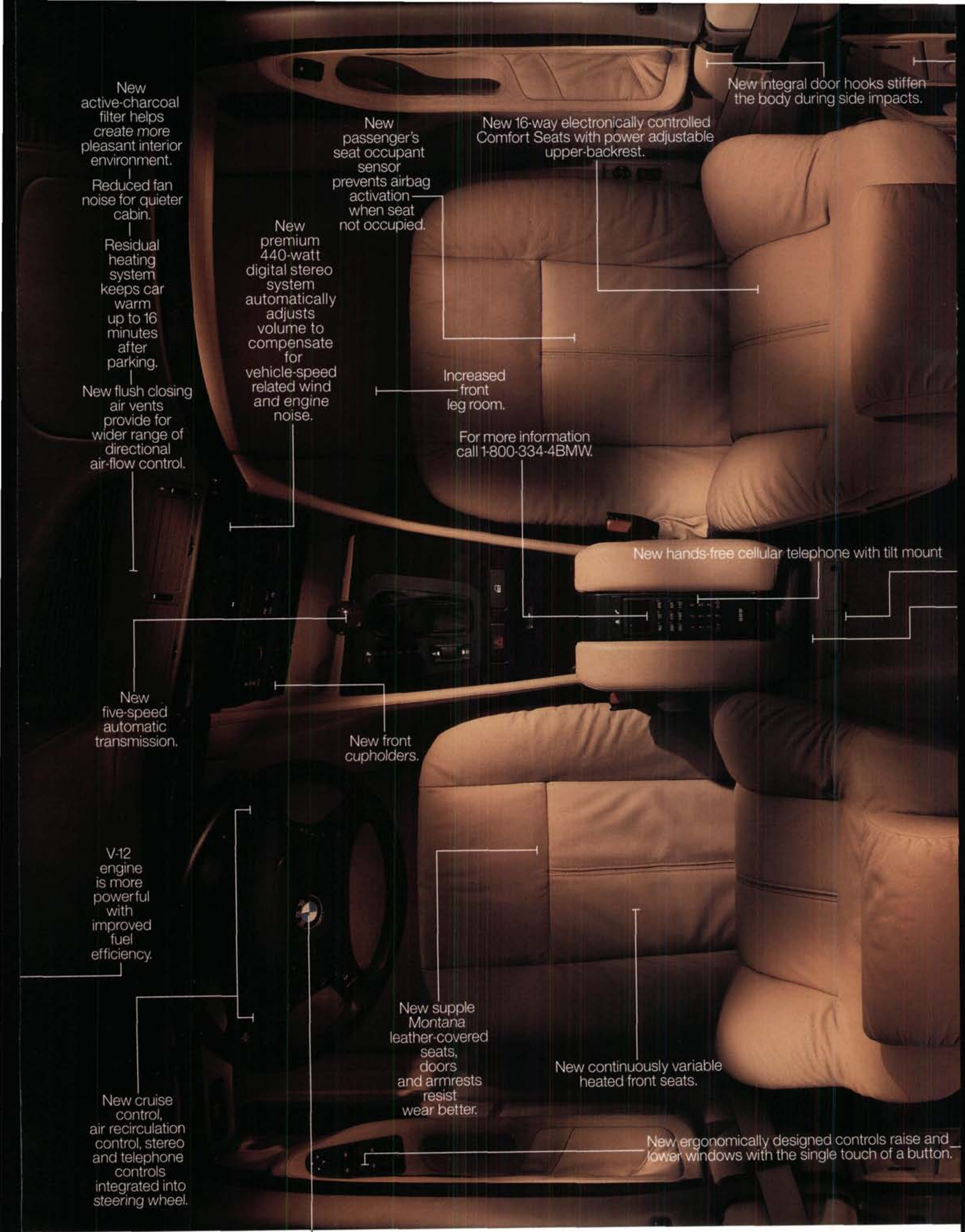

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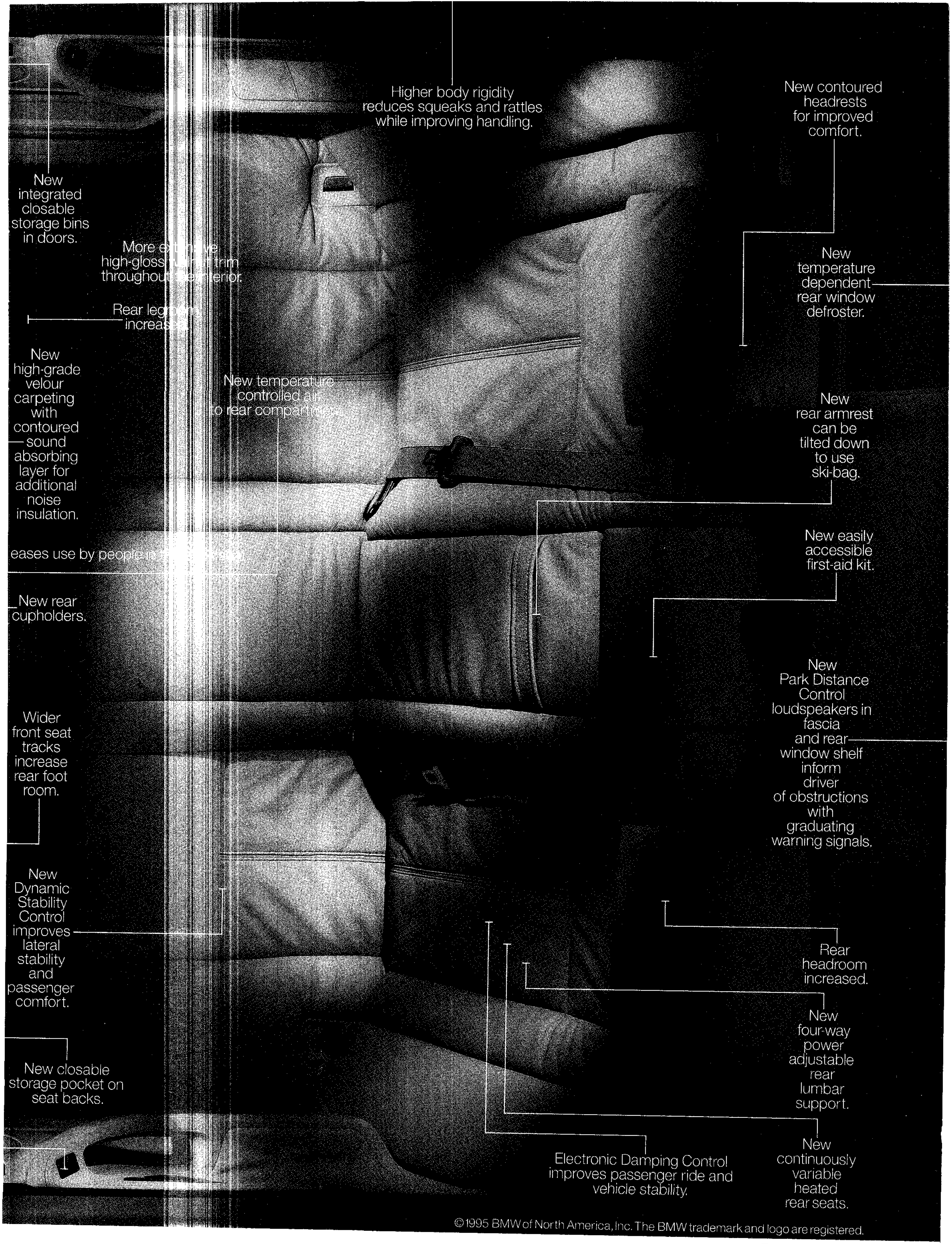

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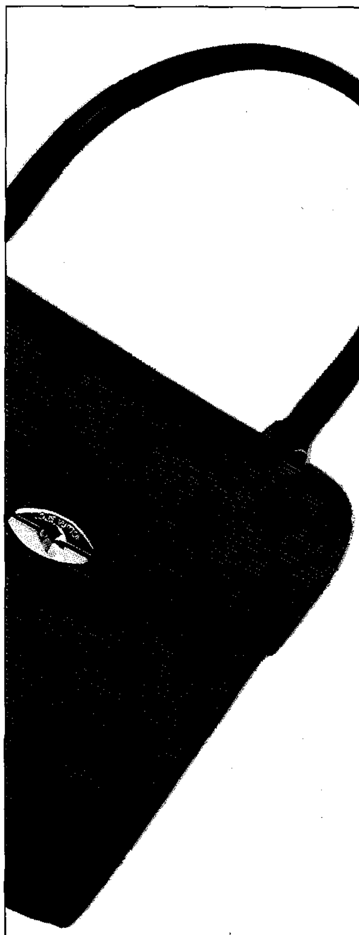

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THE NEW YORKER

MAY 29, 1995

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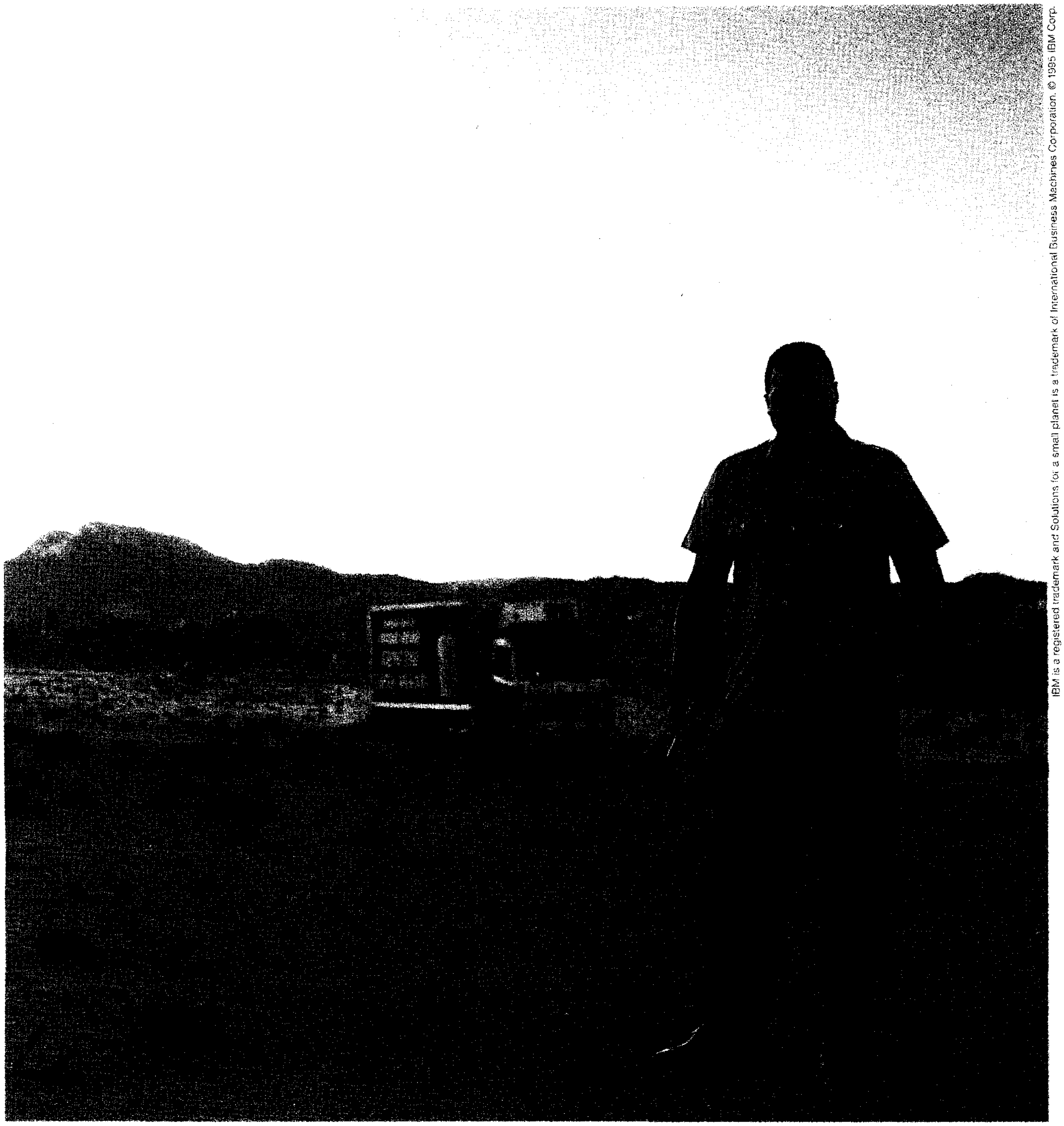

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N.R.A., G.O.P., R.I.P.

Better late than never, but too near never.

GEORGE BUSH didn't make the trip to Phoenix over the weekend for the National Rifle Association's annual convention and gun show. A couple of weeks earlier, the former President, deciding he'd had enough of the N.R.A.'s paranoid babblings about jack-booted federal fascism, had resigned his life membership—a commendable step, for which President Clinton rightly praised him in a post-resignation phone call.

Bush's resignation was a telling little episode in the history of the modern Republican Party. As a Presidential candidate and then as President, Bush, the scion of an older, patrician G.O.P., did his best to flatter the Party's populist constituencies on the right. He joined with other respectable Republicans in picturing the N.R.A. as a group of aggrieved sportsmen; proclaimed himself "born again" and embraced Jerry Falwell; unleashed Lee Atwater and Willie Horton in 1988; and, four years later, allowed his renomination Convention to become a saturnalia of hard-right meanness.

The most memorable episode of that ill-fated Convention was Pat Buchanan's predictably inflammatory call to his troops to "take back our culture" block by block. But the real epiphany came when Bush's own Republican National Chairman, the deliciously named Rich Bond, declared that the other political party was "not America." Bush's genteel Republican patrimony, already feeble, gave up the ghost at that moment; and the perfervid spirit of the 1992 Republican Convention has wafted over the land ever since, intoxicating an alarming number of violence-prone Americans who took the words of Bond and Buchanan literally. Now, safely out of office, and perhaps moved by his Episcopalian conscience, George Bush has drawn a line. Too late, he may have realized that dark forces he thought he could master and exploit are beginning to run amok. Too late, he may have started coming to terms with how he and his associates helped hand the party of Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, and Eisenhower over to an assembly of nativists, Christian authoritarians, states'-rights crypto-Confederates, and their political allies and apologists.

The handing over actually began

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thirty years ago, when Bush, having relocated from Connecticut, was just starting out on a political career, as a Republican representative from Houston. That was a time, difficult to recall now, when there were still plenty of moderates in the G.O.P., and even a few who were willing to be called liberals. In the aftermath of Richard Nixon's failed Presidential run in 1960, it looked as if one of their number—Nelson Rockefeller, Henry Cabot Lodge, George Romney, or William Scranton—might well get the nomination four years later. But, before any of them caught on to what was happening, a well-organized Republican right, under the leadership of Barry Goldwater, captured control of the state-level nominating machinery. Goldwater's disastrous showing in the 1964 general election left the Party professionals to pick up the pieces; however, the damage had been done. Rockefeller tried for the nomination again in 1968, and his failure marked the death of the G.O.P.'s liberal wing in Presidential politics. What remained was the right (with its new hero, Ronald Reagan) and the more traditionally conservative pragmatists (led by a resurgent Nixon), among them George Bush.

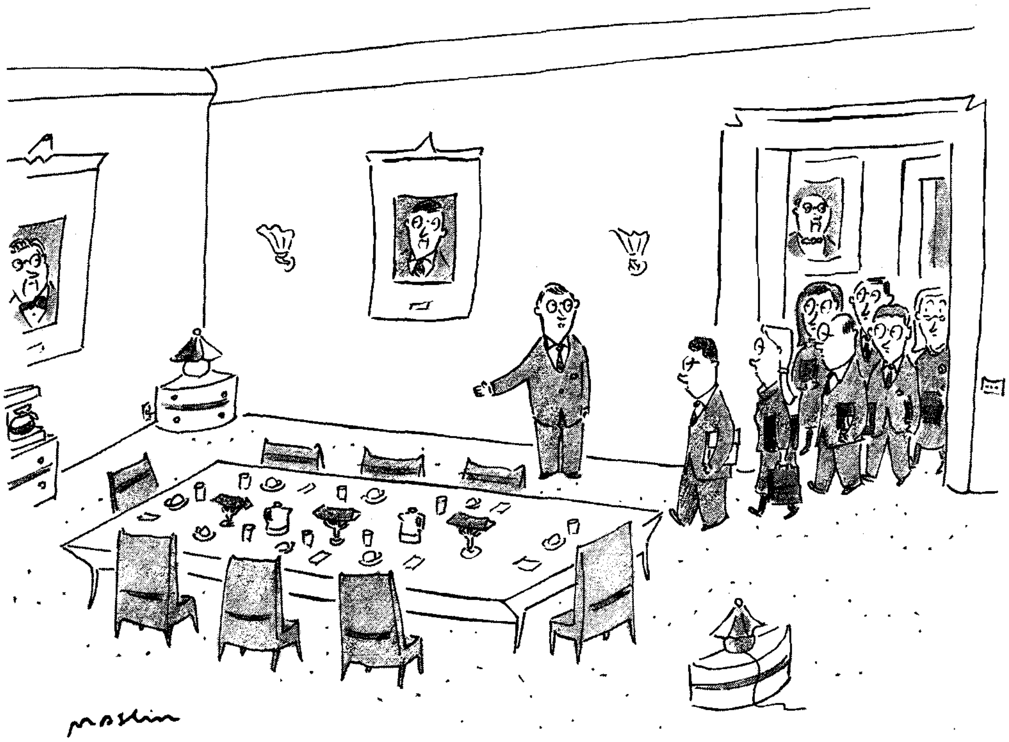
Nixon and the traditionalists prevailed in the short run, although not without difficulty. Reagan and his Californians arrived at the 1968 Republican Convention in high spirits; and, if it had not been for Nixon's old ties with Party regulars and powerful Southerners (including Strom Thurmond), Reagan might have won the nomination then. Nixon worried constantly throughout his first term about challenges from his right. In 1976, after the Watergate scandals, the accidental Republican President Gerald Ford barely avoided losing the nomination to Reagan. Sensing ultimate victory, the Republican right stepped up its organizing efforts, using vehicles like the Moral Majority to solidify its support among white evangelicals, who had been moving toward the G.O.P. ever since the outbreak of the civil-rights struggles, in the late fifties. So in 1980 all that stood between Reagan and the Republican nomination was a traditional mainstream, and by then it was clogged with conservative flotsam.

The Bush of the 1980 primaries, who was financed with Texas oil money and surrounded by conservative advisers, seemed moderate mainly by contrast. Still, he retained enough of the old faith to see Reagan's supply-side nostrums as "voodoo economics," to arouse the suspicions of the Moral Majority types, and to project in his own persona a reassuring Republican probity. Reagan flattened him in the primaries, as he flattened the rest of the field. But, whereas a small group of disappointed moderates left the Party in disgust (to support the Republican schismatic John Anderson), Bush hung in for the main chance. When the Reagan camp offered him a spot on the ticket he readily accepted it.

For eight years, he waited; for eight years, he dutifully toed the voodoo line and all that it demarcated, flip-flopping on abortion and other social issues, building bridges to the populist right. Somewhere in his soul still dwelt a bit of the patrician tradition, and at the 1988 Convention he promised a kinder, gentler country. But, in the campaign that followed, a new Bush took over, casting the opposition as unpatriotic, making promises about taxes that he could not keep, playing the race card, and sweeping to victory.

Having won the prize, though, Bush could not hold on to it. Foreign policy was his selected metier; and for an instant, in the afterglow of the Gulf War, he appeared invulnerable. But when the deficit ballooned he broke his no-tax pledge; thereafter, he seemed to hole up for longer and longer periods in his Kennebunkport retreat, and when he tried to crack jokes (telling reporters to "read my hips") he sounded cynical, and when he tried to act like a man of the people he only showed how far removed from them he was. He had done his part in riling the country against pampered, out-of-touch Washington officials, and then began looking like one himself. Anti-government paranoia redoubled, heightened by a twangy Texas tycoon who helped seal Bush's fate.

Ross Perot, we now know, was neither the only nor the oddest oddball loose in the land. Others were taking to the woods, stockpiling arms, and tuning their radios to the likes of G. Gordon Liddy. George Bush, to his credit, is shocked enough by such things to have cut his ties to the egregious N.R.A. But Bob Dole and the rest of the current Republican Presidential field show no inclination to follow his lead. They still believe that they can harness the furies unleashed over the last thirty years better than poor Bush managed to do. To take a really strong stand against those furies—the furies that destroyed the old Republican Party—just wouldn't be prudent. —SEAN WILENTZ



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TAKE THE MONEY AND RUN

In "Speaker's Dozen" (Comment, April 17th) Hendrik Hertzberg argues that term limits would make elections more competitive by eliminating the inherent advantage of the incumbent. But by limiting congressional terms as Hertzberg suggests, every election in which an incumbent's term came due would be an open race into which special interests could pour unlimited amounts of money. Campaign contributions made by business interests, for example, already exceed those made by labor by a ratio of roughly four and a half to one. Term limits would likely magnify that disparity; only meaningful campaign-finance reform could correct it.

Without such reform, our current system of "dollar democracy" will continue unchecked. With term limits alone, candidates representing the interests of the poor and advocating environmental protection, health-care reform, progressive taxation, and consumer rights would be at an even more severe disadvantage than they are now. If campaigns were publicly financed, however, candidates who chose not to accept contributions from private sources and could prove that they had popular support would receive public money to run their campaigns. A level playing field would thus be established. If we eliminated private money, terms of office would limit themselves.

MARTY JEZER
Working Group for Electoral Democracy
Brattleboro, Vt.

DAYS WITH DOROTHY

Reading Hilton Als's article about Dorothy Dean, "Friends of Dorothy" (April 24th), I had the impression that I was looking at her through the wrong end of a telescope. I knew Dorothy for twenty-nine years, and I find the whole notion of her "reigning" over a Cambridge/New York brotherhood of gay men highly amusing. Not all these gay friends and acquaintances knew one another; certainly the ones who did were not all chummy.

Dorothy did know she was black, was aware of the civil-rights movement, had black friends, and had many women friends who were devoted to her for her entire life. She did say she was a faggot trapped in a woman's body; the black and white elements were added later by others. Dorothy was urbane, intelligent, and witty, and that is why so many people found her attractive.

You got one thing right: people are still dining out on stories and quips. Dorothy was better at it than most; she was also a far more interesting person than the one presented in the article.

HAROLD PETERSON
Minneapolis, Minn.

I was touched by Mr. Als's remembrance of Dorothy Dean, whom I had the distinct privilege of knowing for many years. Dorothy's peculiar, glass-edged perception of life's quirkiness made her company exciting and spontaneous. I treasure to this day memories of debauching, debasing, and generally misbehaving as much as possible with her on many occasions.

Many years ago—twenty or so—I moved to New England. Dorothy's reaction was pure Dorothy: "*Vermont!*" she exclaimed. "Darling, it's too far *uptown!*"

RICHARD CAPLIN
Marlboro, Vt.

CALLING THE CONTRACT

In response to Michael Kelly's "You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet" (Letter from Washington, April 24th): It is not surprising that Newt Gingrich is attempting to blame social spending for our national debt, but that *The New Yorker* has joined the mainstream media in failing to question his assertions is disappointing. Why not mention that even as Gingrich professes concern over a balanced budget, he promotes the expenditure of seventy-two billion dollars for Lockheed F-22 fighters? There is no way that cuts in social spending can compensate for waste of that magnitude.

By declining to challenge the hype surrounding the Contract with America, Kelly lends it undeserved legitimacy.

CHRISTOPHER CASTELLI
Hartford, Conn.

It is those whom Mr. Kelly, in his article on Gingrich's Contract with America, dismisses as "limply defiant" who will have to provide leadership in this fairly unsettling moment in American history.

So far, citizens' groups have not been invited to the meetings where the fine print of the Contract has been drafted by the Newt troopers and industry reps. The grass-roots groups that *have* read the fine print once the bills have been drafted are starting to raise the alarm, and momentum is building across the country to stop the rabid, "know nothing" approach to the dismantling of environmental, public-health, education, affirmative-action, gun-control, and welfare programs which has been the hallmark of the Contract so far. It is fine to sit back and sneer at those who are raising the alarm, but it doesn't do much to change the direction of history.

BARBARA DUDLEY
Greenpeace
Washington, D.C.

HAIL TO THE CHIEF

As Paul Slansky and Edward Sorel point out in "Last Licks" (Shouts & Murmurs, April 24th), a series of Richard M. Nixon commemorative stamps might not be a bad idea. A catchy ad line would, of course, be necessary. How about "Takes a licking and keeps on tricking"?

DAVID ENGLISH
Somerville, Mass.

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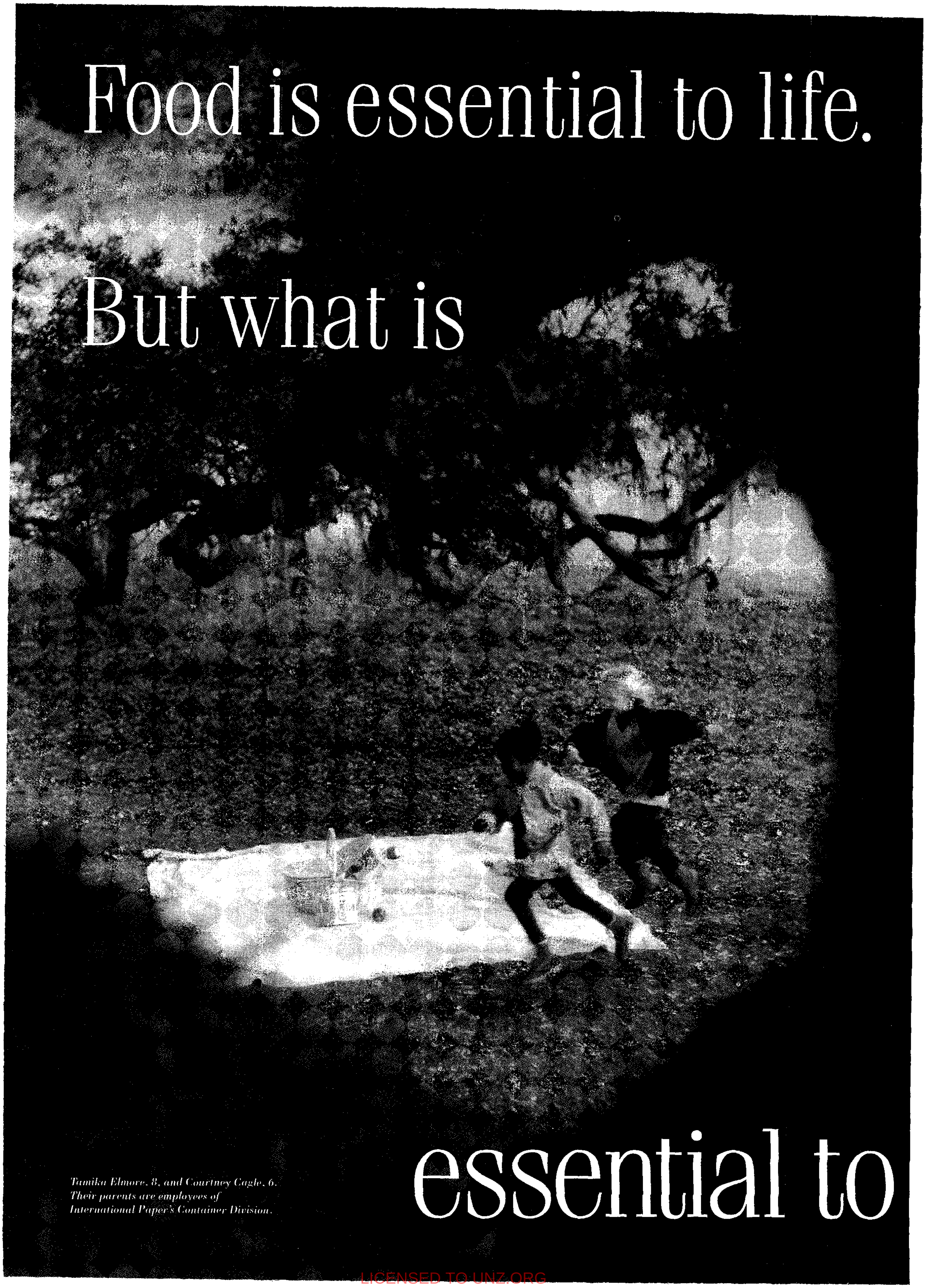
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But what is
essential to

Tamika Elmore, 8, and Courtney Cagle, 6.
Their parents are employees of
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WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

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The abundance of packaging may raise the question: would we be better off without it? The answer: not really. The practical solution is a packaging material that not only fulfills all the requirements of getting food to us but also is ecologically conscious, that is, renewable and recyclable.

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food?

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THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

Cameri Theatre of Tel Aviv—The company's production of Yigal Even-Or's "Fleischer" concludes its run at the Brooklyn Academy of Music on May 24-25. Performances are in Hebrew with simultaneous English translation. (30 Lafayette Ave. 1-718 636-4100.)

Chronicle of a Death Foretold—Lincoln Center Theatre presents a musical adaptation of Gabriel García Márquez's novel, directed and choreographed by Graciela Daniele. In previews. (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Crumbs from the Table of Joy—A Southern black family moves North in the fifties in pursuit of a better life. Written by Lynn Nottage and directed by Joe Morton. In previews. (Second Stage, Broadway at 76th St. 873-6103.)

Ensemble Studio Theater—The second series in this year's one-act marathon continues through May 28, with works by Craig Lucas, Garry Williams, and Bill Bozzone. The six-week marathon ends June 11. (549 W. 52nd St. 247-3405.)

Fortune's Fools—A comedy about dating, love, and marriage in the Gen X set, by Frederick Stroppel. Opens May 24 at 6:45. (Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St. 989-2020.)

Hundreds of Hats—A revue celebrating lyricist/librettist Howard Ashman's musical-theatre and film work ("Little Shop of Horrors," "God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater," "The Little Mermaid," "Aladdin"). Previews begin May 25. (WPA Theatre, 519 W. 23rd St. 206-0523.)

John & Jen—A musical chronicling forty years in the lives of a woman and her younger brother, whose birth in 1952 begins the story. Starring Carolee Carmello and James Ludwig. In previews. (Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 997-1780.)

Lady-Like—Laura Shamas's drama about the love affair between Lady Eleanor Butler and Sarah Ponsonby, who fled Ireland in 1778 to live together in Wales. Opens May 25 at 8. (Grove Street Playhouse, 39 Grove St. 741-6436.)

Prisoner of Love—The New York Theatre Workshop presents an adaptation of Jean Genet's final novel. Directed by JoAnne Akalaitis. In previews. (79 E. 4th St. 302-6989.)

The Radical Mystique—Arthur Laurents' new play revolves around two Greenwich Village friends who are planning a Black Panthers fund-raiser in 1969. In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Simpson Street—Scenes in the life of a Puerto Rican family in the Bronx, by Eduardo Gallardo. Opens May 24. (Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre, 304 W. 47th St. 354-1293.)

Twelve Dreams—James Lapine wrote and directed this drama, inspired by a case study from Carl Jung's "Man and His Symbols." *In previews. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln* Center. 239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

The Acting Company—Presenting "Othello," through May 25. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 346-8510.)

After-Play—Anne Meara's comedy, recently seen at Manhattan Theatre Club, has moved to a new venue, with Ms. Meara in a starring role, along with Barbara Barrie, Larry Keith, and Merwin Goldsmith. (Theatre Four, 424 W. 55th St. 239-6200.)

All About Steve: Musings of an Ebony Queer—In his new solo work, Stephen Patterson takes a comic look at growing up gay, black, and liberal. (Grove Street Playhouse, 39 Grove St. 923-9300.)

Angel Levine—Phyllis K. Robinson has adapted Bernard Malamud's story for the stage, adding musical numbers—a few of which it could have done without. Finkel, a Jewish tailor down on his luck, redeems himself by accepting (after much recalcitrance) a black Jewish guardian angel named Levine. How could he resist? In a couple of jazzy Harlem-honky-tonk scenes and a witty synagogue number that mixes gospel and the hora, Levine (Andre De Shields) and company do the show's most persuasive—actually its only persuasive—singing and dancing. Directed by Peter Bennett, with choreography by Hope Clark. Presented by the Jewish Repertory Theatre. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 831-2000.)

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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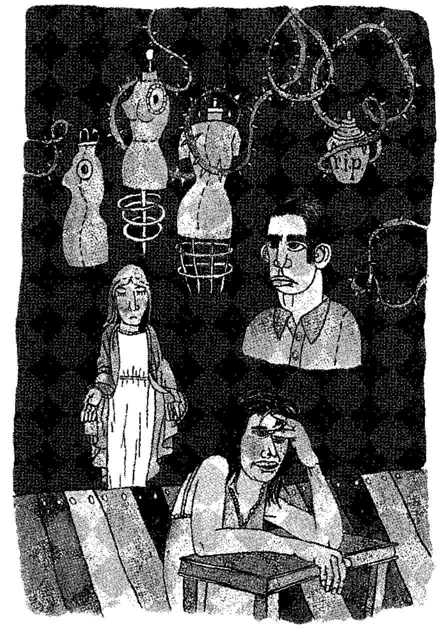
28	29	30				

Arcadia—Despite some casting glitches, the American première of Tom Stoppard's 1993 play, which shuttles between 1809 and the present, is an elegant production of an enormous theatrical feat. In a kind of intellectual mystery story, Stoppard provides the audience with the exhilarating illusion of omniscience, allowing us to solve a riddle of history from clues and connections that the characters, caught in time, do not see. Directed by Trevor Nunn. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/17/95.) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)



Mercedes Ruehl and Anthony LaPaglia, in "The Rose Tattoo."

MARK TODD

Coming Through—The director, Wynn Handman, adapted the script for this production from interviews with immigrants who came to America in the twenties. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 840-3074.)

The Compleat Works of Wllm Shkspr (Abridged)—This slapstick hour-and-a-half romp through the Bard's œuvre, carried out by three fine young gentlemen in high-tops, is utterly sophomoric and a complete waste of time—like some of the best things in life. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 307-4100.)

The Cryptogram—David Mamet's new play, which dramatizes a child's emotional abuse from the child's point of view, ranks with his best work. The actors in this excellent production are Ed Begley, Jr., Felicity Huffman, and Shelton Dane; Mr. Mamet directed. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 307-4100. Closes June 4.)

Damn Yankees—Jerry Lewis, the King of Comedy and the King of France, is now, in his Broadway début, the Prince of Darkness—the Devil himself. The old pro delivers the goods. And Charlotte d'Amboise, a sensational Lola, delivers the goods and then some. (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.)

Dates and Nuts—A romantic comedy by Gary Lennon, about a Brooklyn girl looking for love. (Theatre Off Park, 224 Waverly Pl., at 11th St. 279-4200.)

Death Defying Acts—Three subpar one-act comedies, by David Mamet, Elaine May, and Woody Allen. (3/20/95) (Variety Arts, Third Ave. at 14th St. 239-6200.)

The Donahue Sisters—In Geraldine Aron's thin comedy-drama, three siblings—a homebody, an addled London housewife, and a jaded New York writer—gather at their family's home in Ireland for some sisterly sniping, a huge joint, and a few snorts of vodka. At the very end they recall a childhood atrocity; the revelation is so sudden and unexpected that when the house lights come up you wonder whether they're going to go back down for another act. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 757-3318.)

Ecstasy—Mike Leigh's play is set in a dismal North London flat in the winter of 1979. The late-seventies costumes and set are depressingly perfect, and the actors bring the six working-class characters to life with great specificity and vitality. (Smokeophobes take note: the theatre is tiny, and there's a whole lotta smokin' goin' on.) (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

The Good Woman of Setzuan—The Independent Theatre Company's production of Brecht's parable. (House of Candles Theatre, 99 Stanton St. 353-3088.)

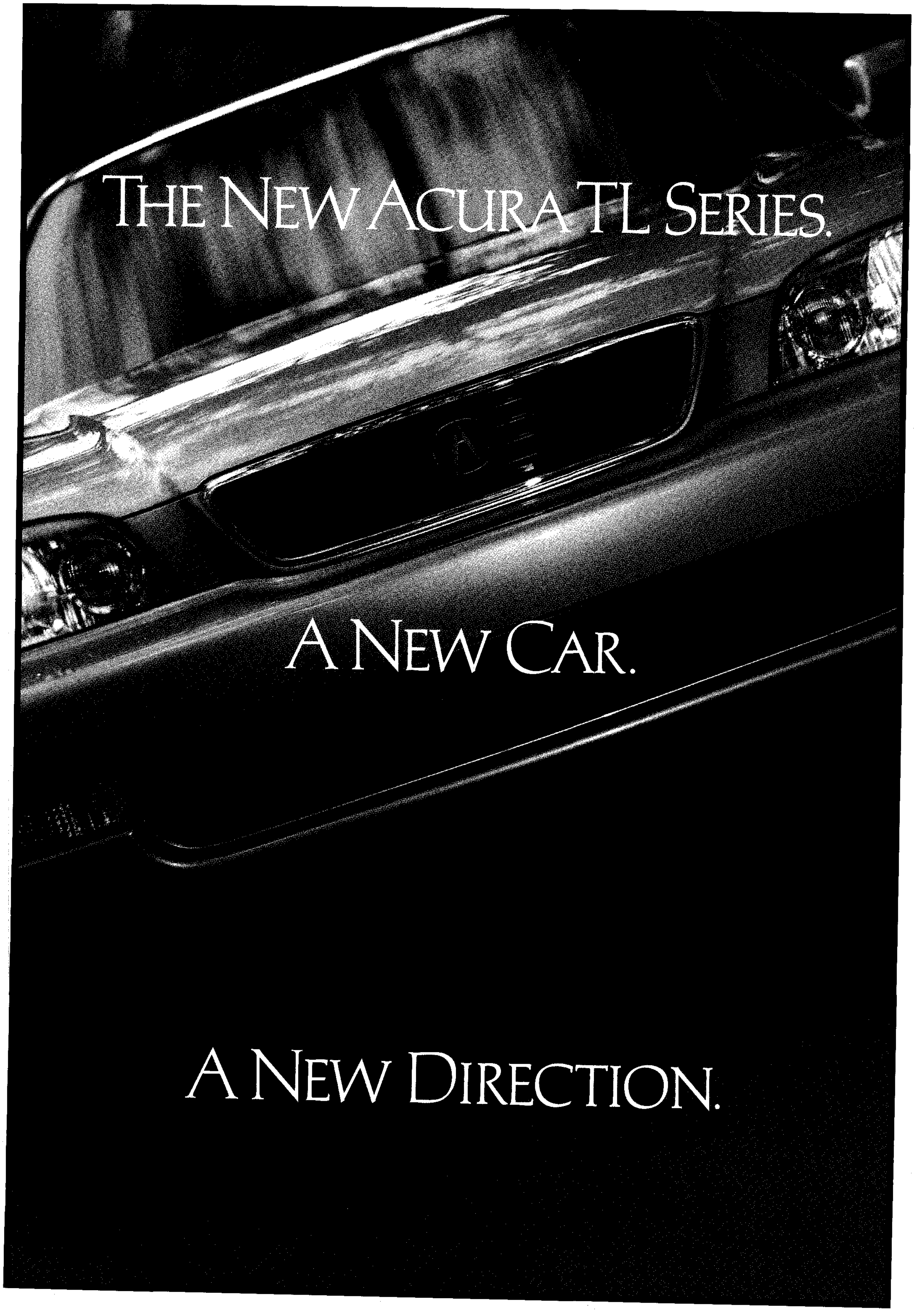
The Hairy Ape—The Wooster Group's workshop production of Eugene O'Neill's 1922 drama, with Willem Dafoe. (Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. 966-3651. Closes June 4.)

Hamlet—London's Almeida Theatre has brought over a postmodern production whose refusal to risk interpretation reflects Britain's current bland and winded state. Ralph Fiennes, an intelligent, reticent player with a drop-dead matinée-idol profile, seems almost as unwilling to enter the vortex of Hamlet's torment as Hamlet himself is to take action. Directed by Jonathan Kent. (5/15/95) (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Having Our Say—Sadie and Bessie Delany, two sisters who have passed the hundred-year mark, presented their vivid life stories in a 1993 best-seller; the book has been adapted beautifully from the page to the stage by Emily Mann, who also directed. Gloria Foster and Mary Alice are brilliant as the sisters, who were taught by their family to "reach high" despite the dogging of Jim Crow. (4/24/95) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter—Theatre for the New City reprises its 1993-94 production of Carson McCullers' 1940 novel. (155 First Ave., at 10th St. 254-1109. Closes June 11.)

The Heiress—A revival of Ruth and Augustus Goetz's 1947 adaptation of Henry James's "Washington Square," directed by Gerald Gutierrez. Cherry Jones, who plays the title character, is exquisitely—almost unbear-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ably—vulnerable. And the wonderful Frances Sternhagen is touching and funny as a widowed aunt. (3/20/95) (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying—In this revival of Frank Loesser's 1961 musical, Matthew Broderick has polish and timing, but he doesn't have the crazy gene that makes a musical star. Lillias White's gospel solo in "Brotherhood of Man," however, lifts the audience into a zone of joy; as a paradigm for the Broadway musical's con game—winning the public's heart while picking its pocket—her display of guile made glorious is as good as it gets. (4/24/95) (Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100.)

Indiscretions—Aside from the set, which wonderfully evokes the airiness of Parisian interiors, the brightest spot in this production of Jean Cocteau's "Les Parents Terribles"—a dark comedy about the perversities of desire in family life—is Eileen Atkins. She plays a severely wise spinster with her usual magnetic minimalism, and it's such an overpowering performance that it threatens to throw the play off balance. Kathleen Turner, as a hysterically possessive mother, is an unfocussed sprawl with a distractingly unplaceable accent. Roger Rees, Cynthia Nixon, and Jude Law also star, under the direction of Sean Mathias, in this import from London's Royal National Theatre. (5/15/95) (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

A Language of Their Own—Chay Yew, a twenty-nine-year-old Singaporean playwright, makes his New York début with this drama about two gay Asian-Americans in Boston who break up and go on to form new relationships. Yew uses words that are plain and simple to get at love's rich complications, especially the way the past persists in the present. B. D. Wong, Francis Jue, Alec Mapa, and David Drake make up the cast. (5/8/95) (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400. Closes May 28.)

The Last Girl Singer—A clever play about three people—an aging Hollywood star (Kelly Bishop) searching for peace as a cabaret singer in Mexico; her self-involved movie-director ex-husband (Bill Tatum), who wants eternal fame; and a wealthy, social-climbing neighbor (Charlotte Maier)—trying to get what they want. The actors keep the drama taut even when, toward the end, the dialogue gets a little unbelievable. Closes May 28. (Kampo Cultural Center, 31 Bond St. 765-1706.)

London Suite—Neil Simon knows how to cater to his audience, but he's serving leftovers: these four one-acts are painfully dated in both their substance and their execution. The main pleasure in this production is Carole Shelley, who provides some much needed comic muscle tone. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

Loose Lips—A comedy revue, featuring the National Transcript Players, based on records of spoken blunders by the Prince of Wales, Clarence Thomas, President Clinton, and other public figures. Harry Shearer is the first in a series of guest narrators. (The Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599.)

Love! Valour! Compassion!—The eight gay men in Terrence McNally's beautifully written drama connect in ways that almost any nuclear family would envy. Under the nimble direction of Joe Mantello, the actors present humbling evidence of what love is and can be. (11/14/94) (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Lust and Comfort—In this meditation on long-term relationships and desire, Peggy Shaw plays a rich American cross-dresser who moves to London to begin a new life as a man. Lois Weaver is her seductive servant. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710. Closes May 27.)

The Mathematics of Change—Josh Kornbluth's comic monologue about his encounters with calculus at Princeton. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. Closes May 28.)

RENE BOTTI

A Month in the Country—Turgenev's drama, set on a Russian estate in the eighteen-forties, is a tale of selfishness and self-delusion in the sphere of love. As Natalya Petrovna, the central character, Helen Mirren leaves no aspect of middle-aged romantic foolishness unplumbed. It's a breathtakingly funny performance, well supported by those of Ron Rifkin and F. Murray Abraham. Scott Ellis directed. (5/8/95) (Roundabout, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400. Closes June 4.)

Night and Her Stars—Moviegoers who have seen "Quiz Show" will experience an unpleasant déjà vu watching Richard Greenberg's play about the fifties game-show scandals. It's even harder the second time around to stomach Charles Van Doren as a tragic hero. By the time Greenberg tries a fresh angle, in the second act, it's too late—you're already fretting that Ralph Fiennes is just around the corner, playing Hamlet. Presented by Manhattan Theatre Club. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200. Closes May 30.)

The Only Thing Worse You Could Have Told Me . . .—Dan Butler offers a procession of characters from the real world of contemporary gay culture, moving seamlessly from one monologue to the next in a one-man show that is by turns hilarious, infuriating, sad, and uplifting—a charmer. (Actors' Playhouse, 100 Seventh Ave. S. 307-4100.)

Party—Seven gay men get together to play a strip version of truth or dare, with terrifically funny (if occasionally didactic) results. The characters in David Dillon's comedy are stereotypes, more or less, but the solid cast makes them believable, and in the end you've had a look at some enduring friendships (and some nice bodies), as well as a very silly evening with what one of the men calls "the Brady Bunch on Fire Island." (Douglas Fairbanks, 432 W. 42nd St. 239-4321.)

Police Boys—Marion McClinton's new play, set in "a future you can touch with your hand," is a tour de force of absolute mayhem. With a prophetic character in traditional West African garb watching over them, five police officers, a district attorney, and a young hood bounce around a station house in an unnamed American city exorcising their inner demons while they assault one another with words, fists, blackjacks, knives, and guns. The drama attempts to show the insidious effects of violence and social injustice, but ultimately the relentless aggression makes it a muddle. The acting, though, is strong, the staging precise, and the set bold. With Akili Prince as the criminal. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes May 28.)

The Professional—Just after the fall of Communism, a dissident writer in Belgrade receives a visit from the policeman who for eighteen years had kept him under surveillance; as the agent presents him with notebooks filled with transcriptions of the writer's speeches and conversations and a trunkload of his personal effects, the strange intimacy of their relationship comes to light. Fritz Weaver is both chilling and benign as the government operative, but he doesn't get much support from the other cast members, or from Dusan Kovacevic's underdeveloped play, either. Translated and adapted by Bob Djurdjevic. Directed by Peter Craze. (Circle Repertory Company, 159 Bleecker St. 239-6200.)

Rob Becker's Defending the Caveman—A hundred-minute standup routine. Some of Becker's examples of discontent between the sexes are very funny (a lot of vigorous nodding goes on in the theatre—never by men and women at the same time), but a fair number of them are shopworn. (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 307-4100.)

The Rose Tattoo—Tennessee Williams's paean to sexual passion—he called it his "love-play to the world"—has returned to Broadway. As the central character, the alternately pious and hot-blooded Serafina, Mercedes Ruehl is funny and affecting (and she looks great in a black slip), and Anthony LaPaglia brings a sweet openness to the role of the young man who puts the bloom back in her cheeks. Robert Falls directed. (5/15/95) (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

Shabbatai—A cross between "Jesus Christ Superstar" and vaudeville, this musical about seventeenth-century Jewish mysticism and a false Messiah employs all kinds of razzle-dazzle tricks: a doo-wop trio (of rebbes), a scantily clad blonde, a narrator with a standup shtick, and a handsome, brooding lead. The music is hummable, the harmonies lovely, the voices terrific, and the lyrics clever if campy. Starring Romain Fruge, Rex Hays, Ken Jennings, and Maggi-Meg Reed. Closes May 28. (American Jewish Theatre, 307 W. 26th St. 633-9797.)

Show Boat—Harold Prince's epic-size production of the 1927 Jerome Kern–Oscar Hammerstein II musical. (10/17/94) (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

Skin—An adaptation of Georg Büchner's "Woyzeck," set in San Diego on a hot summer day. Written by Naomi Iizuka. Directed by John Edward McGrath. (SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 334-0962. Closes May 28.)

Smokey Joe's Café—The Songs of Leiber and Stoller—A feast of early rock and roll, performed by a cast with Grade A lungs and legs. (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

Sunset Boulevard—Glenn Close continues her triumphant run. (12/5/94) (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4007.)

Swingtime Canteen—A re-creation of a 1944 U.S.O. concert, performed in a night club. Extraneous bits of plot threaten to derail the show, but the lovely songs, done with verve and charm, carry the day. (Blue Angel, 321 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Sylvia—A. R. Gurney's new play, directed by John Tillinger, stars Blythe Danner, Sarah Jessica Parker, Charles Kimbrough, and Derek Smith. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Too Jewish?—Avi Hoffman sets about reviving Yiddish—with music—in this revue, a mixture of songs and stories. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

Travels with My Aunt—Giles Havergal, directing his own witty adaptation of Graham Greene's novel, has captured the book's amusingly puzzled tone with his playful, inventive (though overlong) staging. Four wildly different actors—Brian Murray, Jim Dale, Martin Ray-

WELINDER/BOZELL

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ner, and Tom Beckett—all play Henry Pulling, the staid retired banker whose eccentric Aunt Augusta drags him into her international adventures. Dale doubles as Aunt Augusta, and the other three skillfully handle some twenty additional parts. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 420-8000.)

2—Romulus Linney's portrait of Hermann Goering, set in 1945, when Hitler's No. 2 man was on trial in Nuremberg for war crimes. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

Vertigo Park—A love triangle involving a movie star and two future Presidents forms the basis of this comedy, in which playwright Mark O'Donnell sends up our national obsessions. (One Dream, 232 West Broadway. 431-0051.)

Word of Mouth—James Lecesne's remarkably varied solo show: eight characters, eight voices, and (you'd swear) eight bodies. In general, the technique is more startling than the material. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

LONG RUNS

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP / TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CRAZY FOR YOU:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **GREASE!:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **AN INSPECTOR CALLS:** Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **JACKIE MASON: POLITICALLY INCORRECT:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200. Closes June 4. . . . **JELLY ROLL!:** Kaufman, 534 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **KISS OF THE SPIDER WOMAN:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at 8th St. 477-2477. . . . **THREE TALL WOMEN:** Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 279-4200. . . . **THE WHO'S TOMMY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

DANCE

New York City Ballet—May 24 at 8: "Walpurgisnacht Ballet," "Dances at a Gathering," and "Danses Concertantes." . . . ¶ May 25 at 8: "The Goldberg Variations" and "Danses Concertantes." . . . ¶ May 26 at 8: "Serenade," "Operetta Affezionata," "Romeo and Juliet," and "Western Symphony." . . . ¶ May 27 at 2: "Episodes," "Walpurgisnacht Ballet," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," and "Stravinsky Violin Concerto." . . . ¶ May 27 at 8: "Square Dance," "Operetta Affezionata," "Romeo and Juliet," and "Danses Concertantes." . . . ¶ May 28 at 1: "Prodigal Son," "Sinfonia," "Glazunov Pas de Deux," and "The Four Seasons." . . . ¶ May 30 at 8: "Divertimento No. 15," "Prodigal Son," and "The Four Seasons." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. Through June 25.)

American Ballet Theatre—May 24 at 2: "Les Sylphides," "States of Grace," and "In the Upper Room." . . . ¶ May 24 at 8: "Paquita," "How Near Heaven," and "Gaîté Parisienne." . . . ¶ May 25-26 and May 29 at 8, and May 27 at 2 and 8: "La Bayadère." . . . ¶ May 30 at 8: "How Near Heaven," "States of Grace," and "Paquita." (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000. Through June 17.)

"Ordinary Festivals"—Sara Pearson and Patrik Widrig, who usually rely on improvisation, here present an evening-length work of more strictly choreographed—even unison—movement, for twelve dancers and nearly two hundred oranges. The inspiration is still mysterious, though Pearson cites Italian folk music and her desire to evoke a prewar innocence. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. May 25-28 at 9.)

"Fatstick"—Choreographer Gus Solomons, Jr., presents a new work for four dancers and four musicians, in which both movement and music will be controlled by the onstage gestures of the jazz composer Walter Thompson, who wrote the score. Solomons also appears in "G . . . Minor," a solo performed in a black robe that once belonged to Agnes de Mille. (Merce Cunningham Studio, 55 Bethune St. 924-0077. May 25-28 at 9.)

"Under Exposed"—The Dixon Place dance series, curated by Ilaan Egeland, continues, with choreography by Maureen Ellenhorn, Fausto Matias, Jonathan Kinzel, and Johanna S. Meyer and Alexandra Hartman. (Dixon Place, 258 Bowery, near Houston St. May 26 at 8. Tickets at the door on the night of the performance.)

TABLES FOR TWO

Dining around town

Pho Bang, 117 Mott St. (966-3797)—In the continuing contest for the least inviting eating house in Chinatown, Pho Bang is a respectable entry. On certain counts—the cadaverous lighting; the indoor-outdoor carpeting on the walls; the glass tabletops under which red letters spell W-E-L-C-O-M-E and color Xeroxes hawk the menu's greatest hits; and the string of Christmas lights left over from December—this Vietnamese café scores quite high. On the other hand, the food is delicious and the staff is friendly.

Though the waiters like it best when you choose from the placemats' various permutations of meat, shrimp, and rice, they are happy to stand for hours while your table of ten squabbles about what to order. The menu is a triptych for carnivores. In the middle are the conventional favorites: the grilled or lemongrass-scented meats that you wrap up (along with cucumber, pickled carrots, mint, and credit-card-size mats of rice vermicelli) in lettuce leaves. The right-hand panel is the rice-noodle and rice panel. On the left are the *pho*, those rich Vietnamese soups that are as big and as clear as swimming pools. At Pho Bang the *pho* are populated with body parts that you would have a hard time locating on yourself, so there is invariably an argument when someone—the know-it-all who's been to Vietnam and drunk python blood—wants to order the Combination Extra Big Bowl, which has the full corpus of navel, tendon, and fresh eye (O.K., fresh eye of round), plus brisket, *omosa* (tripe), and what appears on the menu as "frank."

Recently, Pho Bang had a mint crisis. According to the staff, the crop had been laid waste by blight, and the aromatic leaf that lights up a summer roll was nowhere to be had. Customers were wrapping up their meats with leaves of cilantro. The change in routine was so unnerving that it was necessary to order extra glasses of *cà phê sữa dà*—a thick, iced caffeine-sugar whammy of espresso and sweetened condensed milk—in recompense. (Open daily, 10-10.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

Beastie Boys—Who knew, when they were fighting for their right to party back in '86, that their fusion of hip-hop and slacker chic was setting the stage for artists like Beck and Luscious Jackson? The Boys' 1994 album, "Ill Communication," showed that while their persona remains pubescent, their understanding of punk and funk values continues to mature. With the Bad Brains. (Madison Square Garden. 465-6000. May 24 at 8.)

Jimmy Heath—To watch this saxman at work is to observe the mind/body split in action. Standing stock still, his face a mask, Heath extracts gorgeous melodies and heartbreaking tones from his horn. Gentler in manner than his contemporaries Rollins and Coltrane were, he distills the intensity of hard bop into a rare essence of texture and meaning. (Bryant Park, Sixth Ave. at 42nd St. May 25 at 12:30.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it is advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Algonquin Hotel, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—**STEVE ROSS** is currently in the midst of an extended run. Dining.

Arthur's Tavern, 57 Grove St. (675-6879)—Mondays belong to the Grove Street Stompers, Tuesdays through Thursdays to Al Bundy and Johnny Parker, Fridays and Saturdays to the Freddy Francis trio, and Sundays to Lee Lorenz and the Creole Cookin' Jazz Band.

Birdland, 2745 Broadway, at 105th St. (749-2228)—May 26-27: The **HENDRICK MEURKINS** quintet. Dining.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through May 28: **DIANNE REEVES.** Dining.

Bradley's, 70 University Pl., at 11th St. (228-6440)—A duskily lit neighborhood bar, where pianists, bassists, and, occasionally, drummers compete for your ear. Truth and beauty usually prevail. Through May 27: a trio featuring **GARY BARTZ** on sax, **GEORGE COLLIGAN** on piano, and **DAVID WILLIAMS** on bass. Dining.

Cajun, 129 Eighth Ave., at 16th St. (691-6174)—A New Orleans-style restaurant specializing in Dixieland and swing. On Fridays, catch the Canal Street Dixieland Jazz and Blues band. Saturdays belong to the New Atlantic Jazz band.

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. (744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound pastel murals, and, through June, the great **BOBBY SHORT.** Time has not diminished the tasteful virtuosity of Short's ivory-tinkling; nor has it taken the edge off his gregarious wit as a singer and showman. A fixture at the Carlyle, he can still spin an Ira Gershwin lyric with all the sophistication, humor, and pathos it deserves. Also well served are gems by Duke Ellington, Dorothy Fields, Irving Berlin, and, of course, Cole Porter. A de-lightful, de-lovely evening. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, **BARBARA CARROLL** is in attendance.

Fat Tuesday's, 190 Third Ave., at 17th St. (533-7900)—Through May 28: vocalist **TESS MARSALIS.** On Mondays, guitarist-inventor **LES PAUL** leads a trio. Dining.

Fifty Seven Fifty Seven, 57 E. 57th St. (758-5757)—A sleek piano-and-bass room in the Four Seasons Hotel. Thursdays through Sundays, **DONALD JOHNSTON** is the featured pianist; on Fridays and Saturdays he performs with a trio. Dining.

Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Across the street from Lincoln Center, this restaurant and club features a handsome bar upstairs and a surreal performance space downstairs. Through May 28: the **Marcus Printup** band. Another bright young trumpeter who's done his homework, Printup forages about in the past to fashion a self-assured, constantly evolving style. Dining.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—May 24: **Joey Baron's Baron Down,** a cool avant-jazz combo led by an irreverent drummer. May 25: **Joey Baron** and the **Fred Frith** duo. Baron joins one of the most influential guitar terrorists of all time. May 27: A Sun Ra tribute.

Match, 160 Mercer St. (343-0020)—This hip SoHo *boîte* is the place to be every Sunday night, thanks to the **Shorty Jackson Legacy Blues Band,** featuring the eighty-nine-year-old **Laurel Watson.** Dining.

Metropolis, 31 Union Sq. W. (675-2300)—A swank basement club, home to elegant jazz combos. May 24: Vocalist **Nora York.** Tuesdays are given over to the **George Gee Orchestra,** a seventeen-piece swing band.

Michael's Pub, 211 E. 55th St. (758-2272)—On Mondays, Woody Allen continues his night job as clarinet player in the **New Orleans Funeral and Ragtime Orchestra,** a Dixieland-jazz ensemble. Closed Sundays.

Rainbow & Stars, 30 Rockefeller Plaza (632-5000)—The preëminent interpreter of the great American songbook, **Mary Cleere Haran** (in through May 27) is an artist of almost supernatural poise. For this engagement, she turns her unblinking eye to the wonderfully tart love songs of Lorenz Hart (1895-1943), who is best remembered as Richard Rodgers' first collaborator. Unlike many club singers, Haran knows the value of understatement; she uses her smile not to wow the room but to light her songs. She also loves to talk, and some of her monologues turn into pocket essays (she may be the only singer who can work Proust and Mel Brooks into the same sentence). It doesn't get much better than this. **Phylicia Rashad** takes over on May 30. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in the Rainbow Room, there's a revolving dance floor, plus swinging big-band music courtesy of the Rainbow Room Orchestra, featuring vocalists Michael Andrew and Claudette Sierra. Closed Sundays and Mondays.

Smalls, 183 W. 10th St. (929-7565)—This aptly named club features up-and-coming players jamming late into the night.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—A convivial and crowded jazz club where the musicians are always top-shelf. An electrified big band belonging to trumpeter **Miles Evans** is in action on Mondays. Dining.

Tavern on the Green, Central Park W. at 67th St. (873-3200)—The Chestnut Room may resemble a hunting lodge decorated by Liberace, but the performances here are no joke. Trumpeter **Harry (Sweets) Edison** begins a weeklong run on May 30. Dining.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through May 28: the **Wessell Anderson & Wycliffe Gordon** quintet. With the Wynton Marsalis septet now a fond memory, saxophonist Anderson and trombonist Gordon are venturing out on their own. Let's hope they've remembered their former leader's concern for form, variety, and space. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

Visiones, 125 Macdougal St., at W. 3rd St. (673-5576)—May 24-27: The **Billy Childs** quintet. Everybody from Phil Woods to Eddie Palmieri calls on **Brian Lynch** (May 30), an extroverted trumpeter with a wide-open sound. In an undependable world, his whirlwind bop is guaranteed.

Zinno, 126 W. 13th St. (924-5182)—A rarity among jazz clubs: somewhere you'd go to eat even if there were no music. May 28: **Michael Moore** and **Bill Charlap.** Moore, a brilliant, lyrical bassist, has a gift for melding with his partners. Here he'll communicate with the adroit pianist Charlap.

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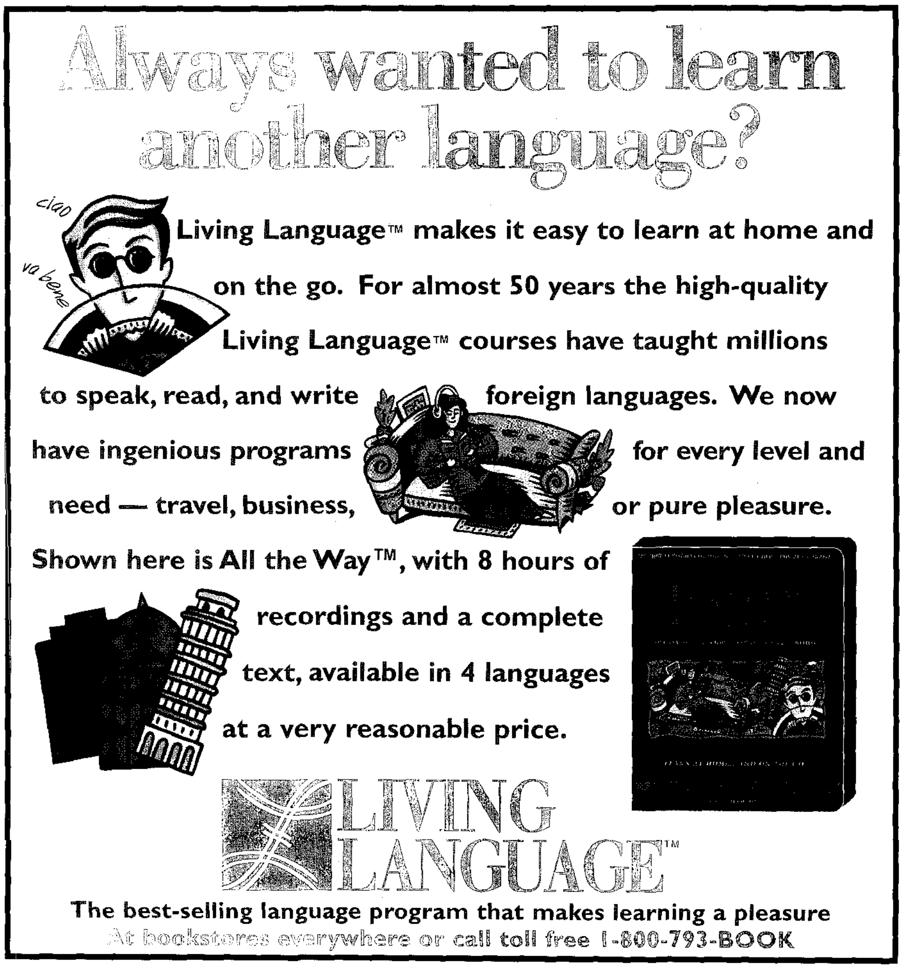
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VAIL VALLEY SUMMER

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ROCK, ETC.

Bar d'O, 29 Bedford St. (627-1580)—Low sofas, moderne ottomans, and venetian blinds make this mirrored living room the perfect spot for late-night love (keep in mind that the joint is named after Pauline Réage's heroine); burnt-orange illumination helps you negotiate your impeccable cocktail. Most nights, the music is up-to-the-minute seventies, but Tuesdays and Sundays, gender channeller **JOEY ARIAS** sets the ceiling fans awhirl.

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—May 24: **SONNY LANDRETH,** a great guitarist and bluesy singer. With the **IGUANAS.** May 26: **BUSTER POINDEXTER.** Dining.

Brownies, 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (429-8392)—The **VELDT** is here on May 27. This fledgling foursome has made a name for itself by fusing funk and modern rock. The concept is hardly novel, but the band pulls it off with surprising conviction.

Café Sin-é, 122 St. Marks Pl. (982-0370)—Singer-songwriter **LISA BRIGANTINO** appears on May 28.

CBGB & OMFUG, 315 Bowery, at Bleecker St. (982-4052)—A narrow, graffiti-strewn cave packed every evening with new and used bands. May 31: The **MUFFS.**

Chicago B.L.U.E.S., 73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—May 24-27: **BIG TIME SARAH** gets down and dirty.

The Cooler, 416 W. 14th St. (229-0785)—A lavender and stainless-steel vault deep in the heart of the meat district. May 26: Spoken-word diva **MAGGIE ESTEP** and the ferocious combo **BABE THE BLUE OX.** Tuesday nights are given over to experimental d.j. spinoffs.

Continental Divide, 25 Third Ave., at St. Marks Pl. (529-6924)—Hipsters, punks, poseurs, N.Y.U. students, the occasional skinhead—a typical East Village bar. Live music nightly.

Don Hill's, 511 Greenwich St. (219-2850)—A tidy little SoHo bar with an above-average P.A. system and top-notch local bands on the docket. Friday night is Squeeze Box, a vinyl-and-velvet gay glamfest, hosted by Mistress Formika.

Duplex, 61 Christopher St., at Seventh Ave. (255-5438)—Everyone is a star here—the pianist, the bartender, the waiters, and the audience. The fabulous **DRESSING ROOM DIVAS** entertain on Friday nights.

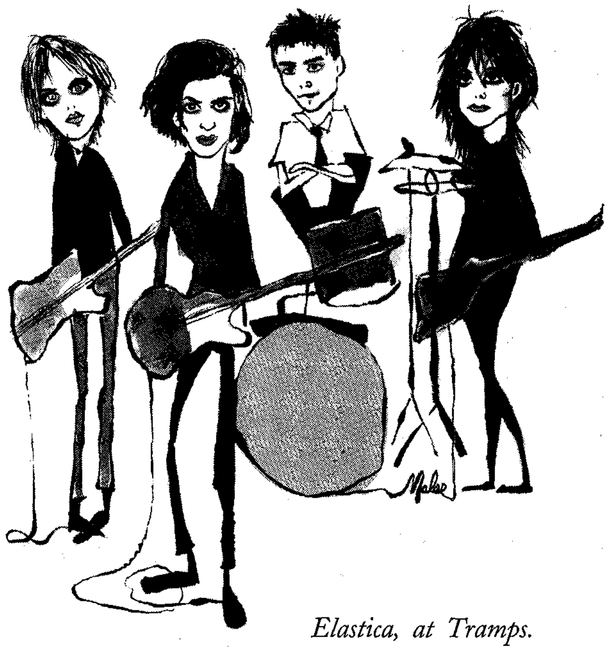
Fez, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—May 30: The **CANDY BUTCHERS.** The **MINGUS BIG BAND** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

Flannery's, 205 W. 14th St. (929-9589)—A well-scrubbed, amiable Irish pub with many of the classic features (pints of Guinness, non-stop TV sports) and a few of the near-classics (a CD jukebox, a portrait of Elvis).

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—This sprawling two-floor establishment has been all things to all people: meeting hall, rock club, jazz club, Off Broadway theatre. May 25: **ALL.** . . . ¶ Soul Kitchen, the original seventies funk and R. & B. party, goes down (late) every Tuesday. . . . ¶ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday. The members share a passion for the Lindy Hop, a dance that involves a lot of whirling and the occasional display of underwear. Sets from eight until midnight. For information on the society, call 696-9737.

Kaptain Banana, 101 Greene St. (343-9000)—French cabaret *en travesti* in SoHo. Three drag queens and eight dancers re-create the Court of Versailles, a carnival in Rio, Marlene Dietrich, and the Andrews Sisters. There's also a singing gorilla. Dining.

Limelight, Sixth Ave. at 20th St. (807-7850)—The rock-and-roll church. Wednesday night is Disco 2000, a fin-de-siècle blowout.



Elastica, at Tramps.

ROBERT MELEE

Ludlow Street Café, 165 Ludlow St. (353-0536)—A modest belowstairs room that looks like a spruced-up tenement apartment. Mondays belong to **BEAT RODEO,** a straight-shooting bar band that plays a mixture of country, blues, Dylan, Byrds, Velvets, and various pop curiosities.

Nell's, 246 W. 14th St. (675-1567)—A Victorian-style club, home to an eclectic crowd of downtown youngsters dancing to throbbing funk and techno-pop. Monday night is Funky Buddha, with live bands and d.j. Derek Corley "on the wheels."

Paddy Reilly's Music Bar, 519 Second Ave., at 29th St. (686-1210)—**BLACK 47** usually plays on Saturdays, and Speir Mor (Gaelic for Big Sky) performs for a hearty following on Fridays. Séisiún—a traditional Irish jam—is on Thursday nights.

Les Poulets, 16 W. 22nd St. (229-2000)—The name may be French, but the music here is Latin: expect salsa, merengue, and the occasional cha-cha. Dining.

Rodeo Bar, 375 Third Ave., at 27th St. (683-6500)—The walls simulate a log cabin, smoke blows through the nostrils of a buffalo head, a horse trailer has been converted into a bar, and you get peanuts for eating and, sometimes, throwing. Sunday evenings belong to **THE FLYING NEUTRINOS,** a New Orleans jazz band led by cousins Ingrid Lucia and Todd Lundagin. Lucia's lowdown singing, sassy patter, and mischievous grin are a lot like Billie Holiday's, and Lundagin plays trombone, tap-dances, and has a disarming Chet Baker-style voice.

S.O.B.'s, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—A great grass hut with a fruit-and-bamboo motif, dedicated to calypso, reggae, and the bossa nova. Dining.

Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—May 25: Brit sensation **ELASTICA.** "I hardly know you, but I think I'm going to," sings Justine Frischmann in "Car Song," a standout track from the quartet's eponymous début album. That's how most of the group's dedicated followers have been feeling about Elastica for the past few months, as music-world headlines—and the band's own nods to the bygone sounds of Blondie and the Buzzcocks—have placed them at the forefront of the so-called New Wave of New Wave. With its punchy guitars, spiky rhythms, and abundant brattiness, perhaps Elastica can establish that ever-elusive Stateside beachhead.

Webster Hall, 125 E. 11th St. (353-1600)—A byzantine disco wonderland with four floors, a coffee shop, and a wig boutique. Wednesday is drag night. Psychedelic Thursdays feature grunge acts and cheap beer.

Wetlands, 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—**YOSSI PIAMENTA,** the "Hasidic Hendrix," lights up this vast environmentally friendly club on May 24.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St.—"Art and Empire: Treasures from Assyria in the British Museum." The booty from Austen Henry Layard's spectacular excavations at Nineveh and Nimrud in the eighteen-forties landed in the British Museum, and for the most part it remained there until this splendid loan exhibition. A series of superbly rendered low-relief stone carvings possesses Homeric narrative power and irresistible charm; in one that shows soldiers swimming across the Euphrates to escape Assyrian archers, the trees on the bank are as vivid as Matisse cutouts. The freshest, most beautiful piece is a small ivory panel inlaid with gold, lapis lazuli, and carnelian, which depicts a man being devoured by a lion. A room devoted to Layard himself includes some Mesopotamian jewelry that the archeologist gave his wife, and it's as illuminating about the Victorians as the great carvings are about the Assyrians. A small companion exhibit, "Assyrian Origins," displays early objects from the collection of the Vorderasiatisches Museum, in Berlin. . . . ¶ A major exhibition of work by Nadar (1820-1910). The great French photographer had a shrewdness about the relationship between publicity and fame which made him a forerunner of contemporary sensibilities—a sort of nineteenth-century Andy Warhol. The prominent Parisians who sat for him included Berlioz, Delacroix, and Dumas *père*. Like Warhol, Nadar formed a surrogate family out of his fellow bohemians. In addition to capturing underground characters, he shot underground Paris itself: the catacombs, with their skeletons, their sewers, their haunting chiaroscuro expanses. And he was obsessed with hot-air balloons and flying machines, photographing them, investing in them, and crashing in them. (His pictures of model helicopters suggest Duchamp's conceptual objects and Calder's mobiles.) Particularly fascinating are the images, including physiological experiments and Pierrots, that Nadar's younger brother had a hand in. The curators fall into a not quite convincing favoritism when they compare the older brother's talent with that of his less respected, less versatile, less productive, and far less famous sibling. Through July 9. . . . ¶ "An Egyptian Bestiary," a large non-petting zoo of falcons, baboons, hippos, and ibis, in stone, ivory, gold, bronze, and wood. . . . NOTE: The museum's roof garden is open, when weather permits. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St.—"Masterworks from the Louise Reinhardt Smith Collection," thirty-six paintings, drawings, and sculptures by, among others, Kandinsky, Picasso, Monet, Seurat, Braque, Degas, and Moore. . . . ¶ "Helen Chadwick: Bad Blooms." Large, round photographs of flowers suspended in different substances (dandelions in hair gel, narcissi in bath bubbles, bluebells in oil and milk). Through July 11. . . . ¶ "American Sculptors in the 1960s: Selected Drawings from the Collection." A superb group of works on paper, with an emphasis on American minimalism and post-minimalism. Many are working drawings, and the curators have also included some of the finished sculptures—by Sol LeWitt, Robert Smithson, and Carl Andre; Smithson's mirrored corner piece is especially beautiful. Through June 13. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 8:30.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—Selections from the permanent collection are on view. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Guggenheim Museum SoHo, 575 Broadway—An exhibition of Gary Hill's video installations. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Saturday evenings until 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St.—The 1995 Whitney Biennial. For decades, the Biennial was curated by committee, and detractors complained that so many backs were being scratched that there was no room for any fresh work. That changed in 1993; this year Klaus Kertess, the museum's adjunct curator of drawings, did the choosing, and there are fewer scratched backs. Some of the best work comes from outside New York. Nancy Rubins, a Los Angeles sculptor, has created a thrilling installation by jamming hundreds of mattresses together and hanging them from the ceiling, then stuffing cakes into the crevices. Cake is a theme: Austin Pop artist Peter Saul has contributed an outrageously funny cartoon painting showing God as a pink-frosted slice flanked by Elvis as Jesus and a black floozy as the Virgin. Kertess has even included Mexican and Canadian artists—the magical canvases by the Monterrey painter Julio Galán are some of the strongest in the show. A lot of important New Yorkers are unhappy with the lineup, so Kertess must have done something right. Third floor through June 4; fourth floor, June 11; second floor and lower gallery, June 25. (Open Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8, with no admission charge after 6; and Fridays, 11 to 9, with no admission charge after 6 and live music and performances in the lower gallery.)

Brooklyn Museum, Eastern Parkway—"The Pictographs of Adolph Gottlieb," a series of sixty gridded paintings with Native American, Freudian, Joycean, and other imagery, in free-associative compositions. . . . ¶ The museum has impressively reinstalled its African holdings. The art works and artifacts span a millennium and encompass scores of cultures. Much is beautiful, and much is familiar, but it's the weirder stuff that really catches the eye—for example, a gilt "linguist staff" from Ghana. . . . ¶ "A Graphic Odyssey: Romare Bearden as Printmaker." Through July 9. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

Cooper-Hewitt Museum, Fifth Ave. at 91st St.—Beach parties, cocktails, airplanes, and modern-art patterns, in an array of colors and textures, are the stars of "Kitsch to Corbusier: Wallpaper from the 1950s." . . . ¶ "The Structure of Style: Dutch Modernism in the Applied Arts 1880-1930." . . . ¶ A display of jewelry and accessories from the museum's collection, including Egyptian mummy beads and gold snuffboxes. (Open Tuesdays, 10 to 9, with no admission charge after 5; Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5; Sundays, noon to 5.)

Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St.—"Gems of the Floating World," seventy flawless examples of ukiyo-e, the highly stylized wood-block prints of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Kitagawa Utamaro's "House Cleaning in the Palace," a four-foot-long tour de force, shows three samurai stumbling back after a night of drinking while the maids at home are tidying up; as an instance of perfectly composed chaos, the swirling, antic composition rivals anything in Poussin. Through June 4. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 5.)

Jewish Museum, Fifth Ave. at 92nd St.—"Camille Pissarro: Impressionist Innovator" includes many of the artist's landscapes, figure paintings, family portraits, and Japonism-inspired design experiments. Through July 16. . . . ¶ "Women Photographers of the Weimar Republic," late-twenties and thirties works by Lucia Moholy, Lotte Jacobi, Hannah Höch, Florence Henri, and others. Through July 30. . . . ¶ Lithographs by El Lissitzky, woodcuts by Max Weber and Luis Camnitzer, and prints by Marc Chagall are on display

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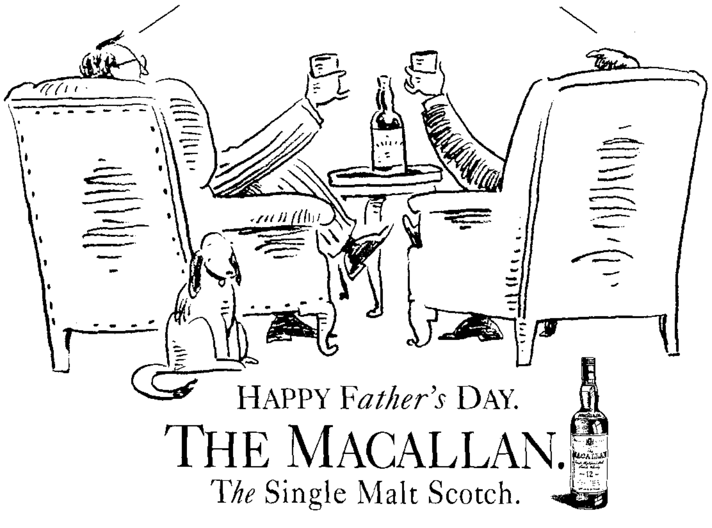

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in "Tricksters, Tailors and Fools: Yiddish Tales Through Artists' Eyes." Through July 30. (Open Sundays through Thursdays, 11 to 5:45; Tuesday evenings until 8.)

Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St.—"Auld Acquaintances: Famous Music from the James Fuld Collection." More than two hundred items, including a first edition of Beethoven's "Moonlight" Sonata. (See Classical Music.) Starts May 24. . . . ¶ "The Fox and the Grapes: Aesop through the Ages." Starts May 24. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10:30 to 5; Saturdays, 10:30 to 6; Sundays, noon to 6.)

Museo del Barrio, Fifth Ave. at 104th St.—"Reaffirming Spirituality," the third exhibition in the series "Artists Talk Back: Visual Conversations with El Museo." In every installment, participating artists have each chosen a work from the permanent collection to display alongside one of their own. Among the current thirty-four are Cándida Alvarez, Carlos Gutiérrez Solana, George Crespo, and Jaime Davidovich. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 5; Thursdays, noon to 7.)

Museum for African Art, 593 Broadway—Antelope, leopards, hyenas, snakes, chameleons, buffalo, pangolins, and warthogs—they can all be seen in "Animals in African Art: From the Familiar to the Marvelous." (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10:30 to 5:30; Saturdays, noon to 8; Sundays, noon to 6.)

Museum of the City of New York, Fifth Ave. at 104th St.—"Curating New York: The Legacy of Grace M. Mayer" is a tribute to the museum's first curator of prints and photographs. Fifty works are on view, including photographs by Berenice Abbott and the Wurts brothers, prints by Currier and Ives, political cartoons by Rollin Kirby, and cityscapes by Reginald Marsh. . . . ¶ "New York Saved: Thirty Years of Landmarks Preservation." Through July 30. . . . ¶ "A Century Apart: Images of Struggle & Spirit, Jacob Riis and Five Contemporary Photographers." Documents of the city's poor by the nation's first photojournalist, alongside work on similar themes by Martine Barrat, Mary Ellen Mark, Margaret Morton, Jeffrey Henson Scales, and Fred R. Conrad. (Open Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 5; Sundays, 1 to 5.)

National Academy of Design, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—"Nature Observed, Nature Interpreted," nineteenth-century landscape drawings, watercolors, and oils by seventeen American artists, including Church, Cole, Homer, and Vedder. Through June 13. . . . ¶ "Masterpieces of Nineteenth-Century Italian Painting," works by Giuseppe de Nittis, Guglielmo Ciardi, Giovanni Fattori, and others, from the Gaetano Marzotto collection. Through June 11. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 5; Friday evenings until 8, with no admission charge after 5.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

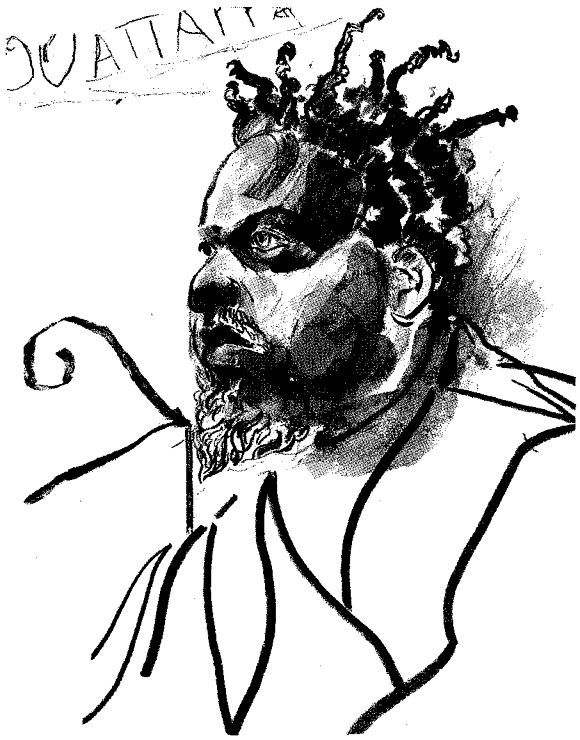
(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

Richard Estes—The masterly Photo-Realist's first one-man show in twelve years: Manhattan street scenes, mostly. These seventeen paintings, brilliantly rendered in a cool, non-style style, constitute an exercise in vanishing points that is closer in spirit to Piero della Francesca than to anything in the modern tradition. Through June 10. (Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. Open Mondays.)

Arshile Gorky (1904-48)—Thirty-nine drawings from the early thirties that show his developing abstract vocabulary. Through May 26. (Mazoh, 67 E. 93rd St. Open Mondays; closed Saturdays.)

Philip Guston (1913-80)—A mini-retrospective of the artist's great fifties abstractions. The show crescendos from cool, understated near-monochromes to massive, shifting forms in boldly contrasting colors. Through June 3. (McKee, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.)

Ray Johnson (1927-95)—A memorial exhibition for the artist, who committed suicide in January, that includes many of his collages (including early, proto-Pop examples), documentations of Conceptual performances (which he called "nothings"), and pieces of "mail art"—thousands of business envelopes containing collages and photocopies related in cryptic ways to their recipients and meant to be added to and sent on to someone else or returned to the artist. Through June 16. (Feigen, 49 E. 68th St.)



Ouattara, at 65 Thompson Street Gallery.

DAVID TOMB

Andy Warhol (1930-87)—The Fuller Building (41 E. 57th St.) is the site of two shows from Pop's founding father that together form an impromptu overview of his career. At Robert Miller: nudes, early and late. Nowhere near Warhol's best work, they are basically gilded trash, though the sensational pornographic drawings of male genitals have been tossed off with a Matisse-like panache. Though June 16. . . . ¶ At O'Hara: a more interesting exhibit—of works from every period of the artist's career—includes some classic early pieces: a very mod 1966 collage portrait of Barbara Feldon in polka dots; a 1961 painting of Schlitz beer cans; and one of Warhol's first multiples, a rarely seen 1963 suite called "$1.57 Giant Size." Through June 3.

Picasso^3—Three shows provide a feast for the Picassophile. At Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St.: "Picasso and Drawing." A magnificent exhibition that spans more than sixty years of the master's drawings, from tentative student work to the concupiscent fancies of old age. A powerful, masklike charcoal from 1907 comes out of his first flirtation with African images; an early Cubist collage deftly delineates a figure in ink, pencil, and bits of wallpaper. A number of paintings are also included, among them a large monochrome oil sketch for the famous, sentimental "Portrait of Mme. Picasso," which shows the subject holding a child in her lap. A group of David Douglas Duncan's photographs of Picasso in his studio accompanies the exhibit. Through June 23. . . . ¶ At Marks, 1018 Madison Ave., at 79th St.: Eight oil paintings and four large works on paper made in his Rue des Grands-Augustins studio, in Paris, between 1939 and 1947. Through June 24. . . . ¶ At Krugier, 41 E. 57th St.: "Sketchbooks 1900-1905," including studies for "The Absinthe Drinker" as well as for children playing and dance-hall girls, along with large drawings from the same period. Through June 17.

Short List—**luis cruz azaceta,** Frumkin-Adams, 50 W. 57th St. Through June 2. . . . **william glackens** and **alfred h. maurer,** Kraushaar, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. Through June 16. . . . **alfredo jaar,** Galerie Lelong, 20 W. 57th St. Through June 17. . . . **ephraim rubenstein,** De Nagy, 41 W. 57th St. Through June 17. . . . **tom wesselmann,** Janis, 110 W. 57th St. Through June 10.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Nancy Ballitt—Island landscapes in pastels on paper. Through June 10. (Atlantic, 475 Broome St. Opens at noon.)

Mark di Suvero—With Sol LeWitt at Ace and Richard Serra at Marks, it's been a great spring for monumental sculpture; these three massive works help fill out the picture. "For Kepler" (1995), a breathtaking cadmium-red steel behemoth with one beam extending more than thirty feet into empty space, is a vision of awesome daring. The two smaller sculptures have moving parts and resemble menacing pieces of playground equipment. Through May 27. (Gagosian, 136 Wooster St.)

Konstantin Kakanias—"No More Stains!" An installation of eleven small "houses" lit from within by votive candles, their interiors painted with surprisingly merry scenes of sexual license, infantile aggression, torture, murder, and incontinence. While you stoop to look through the windows and doors, what appears to be a Greek village woman, in a shapeless black dress and black kerchief, shuffles about patiently tidying up the gallery or whitewashing the houses. At once funny and scary, she is Kakanias himself, reminding us of the root meaning of "catharsis": a cleansing, a purging. Through May 27. (Postmasters, 80 Greene St.)

Sol LeWitt—"New Structures," a daunting series of mortared cinder-block towers at a suitably gargantuan gallery. With his faint pencil wall drawings and his lattice sculptures, LeWitt was one of the sixties progenitors of dematerialization. But in these dark, hulking, sublime works, he seems to be taking a leaf from Richard Serra's book. Through May 31. (Ace, 275 Hudson St. Opens at 1.)

Ouattara—Huge, resonant paintings that mix pan-African shapes and symbols (ankhs, shields, drums) with found objects (a burlap coffee bag, record-album covers) and scrawled mathematical signs. Trained as a shaman in his native Ivory Coast, Ouattara has lived on lower Broadway for seven years now, and he has become an anomalous hybrid: a traditional African artist (he ascribes the mystic powers of fetishes to his paintings) who is also a thoroughly Manhattanized painter. Through June 10. (65 Thompson Street Gallery.)

Nam June Paik—A twenty-five-by-fifteen-foot video wall sculpture in the form of a map of the United States, with neon elements and video images from around the country. Also on view are a laser projection piece and an homage to Charlotte Moorman. Through June 3. (Holly Solomon, 172 Mercer St.)

Joyce Pensato / Scott Burton (1939-89)—Monolithic paintings and drawings of cartoon characters stretched and tortured with Abstract Expressionist gestures and drips. A massive charcoal Mickey Mouse, rubbed directly onto the gallery walls, looms like a balloon from a Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in hell. / Cool, tasteful sculptures in granite, steel, and sandstone. Through May 27. (Protetch, 560 Broadway.)

Elaine Reichek—"Form Security Administration," an installation based on black-and-white photographs of Southern churches. Reichek has enlarged the originals, hung them upside down, and superimposed texts by Flaubert, Marx, and others. Next to each photo is a knitted re-creation of the building, right side up. Playing art against documentation, romanticism against modernism, Reichek invites us to consider the use of poverty and misery as aesthetic subject matter. Through May 26. (Klein, 40 Wooster St.)

Alexis Rockman—Works on paper. Most are comparatively straightforward depictions of flora and fauna. (Some of the pencil drawings of insects and arachnids would be at home in an entomology textbook.) Except for an occasional foray into interspecies miscegenation, there is little evidence of the artist's previous fascination with weirdness and mutation in the natural world. Rockman's line is precise, his colors lapidary; still, this show represents no advance in his art. Through June 10. (Gorney, 100 Greene St.)

Richard Serra—"To Whom It May Concern" (1995) is the master of scary gigantism's latest monumental sculpture, and, unlike some of his other works, this one doesn't beat you into submission. Nine freestanding Cor-ten steel slabs, each twenty-two feet long and eight inches wide—only the heights are different—form an open, non-claustrophobic labyrinth through which visitors can stroll. Through June 25. (Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. Open Thursdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

George Stoll—A deliciously sensuous installation of colored beeswax-and-paraffin sculptures, based on Tupperware forms. Although Stoll acknowledges their campy provenance, he wrests a formal brilliance out of his unlikely models. Elegantly installed, the sculptures exhibit a spectrum of electric and pastel colors. And the beeswax smells divine. Through June 4. (Morris, 530 W. 22nd St. Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

Short List—**JENNIFER BARTLETT,** Cooper, 155 Wooster St. Through May 31. . . . **HERBERT BAYER,** Kent, 67 Prince St. Through June 3. . . . **CHRISTOPHER BROWN,** Thorp, 103 Prince St. Through June 10. . . . **SPELMAN EVANS DOWNER,** Arstark, 568 Broadway. Through June 10. . . . **ARTURO DUCLOS,** Nosei, 100 Prince St. Through May 31. . . . **JIMMIE DURHAM,** Klagsbrun, 51 Greene St. Through May 27. . . . **WILLIAM GIERSBACH,** 55 Mercer Street Gallery. Through June 3. . . . **ANNETTE LEMIEUX,** Dahn, 39 Wooster St. Through June 17. . . . **CATHERINE MURPHY,** Lennon, Weinberg, 580 Broadway. Through May 27. . . . **ROXY PAINE,** Feldman, 31 Mercer St. Through June 3. . . . **KENNY SCHARF,** Shafrazi, 119 Wooster St. Through June 3. . . . **CHRISTOPHER WOOL,** Luhring Augustine, 130 Prince St. Through June 3.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Tina Barney—New, funny, sometimes caustic pictures of the artist's family, this time loosely centered on couples. Through May 31. (Borden, 560 Broadway.)

New York School—Vintage urban landscapes, street scenes, and portraits by Louis Faurer, Lisette Model, Leon Levinstein, and Weegee. Through June 30. (Sander, 19 E. 76th St.)

Short List—**MIKE DISFARMER,** Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. Through June 3. . . . **DALE KISTEMAKER,** Lowinsky, 578 Broadway. Through May 27. . . . **RUTH ORKIN,** International Center of Photography, 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8; through July 16. . . . **SAM SAMORE,** Nordanstad, 289 Hudson St. Opens at noon; through May 27. . . . **MICHAEL SPANO,** Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St. Through May 26. . . . **JO ANN VERBURG,** Mann, 42 E. 76th St. Through June 24. . . . **JEFF WALL,** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. Open Mondays; through June 10. . . . **JOEL-PETER WITKIN,** Pace-MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. Through June 24.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, the Jewish Museum, and the Museum of the City of New York.)

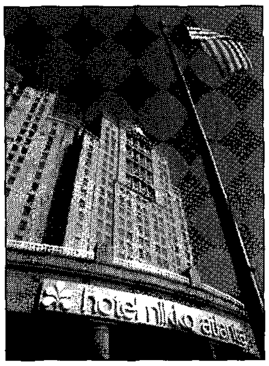
CLASSICAL MUSIC

Look Hear Now

Music lovers who visit the Morgan Library tend to go weak in the knees when they encounter its music collection. Weak knees will abound at the Morgan's new exhibit "Auld Acquaintances: Famous Music from the James Fuld Collection" (May 24-August 20; call 685-0610 for information). Fuld, an attorney and a music bibliographer, started collecting first editions of sheet music seventy-five years ago, when the great American song classics were rolling off the presses. He cites Gershwin's "The Man I Love" as his favorite song by his favorite American composer—and visitors will see that in the original edition the title was misprinted as "The Man I Loved." Some two hundred of Fuld's ten thousand items are on display, and they're all choice. The first printing of Bach's "Goldberg" Variations (1742) is here; so are those of "Three Blind Mice" (or "Blinde," as it was spelled in 1609) and "The Marines' Hymn" (which turns out to be by Offenbach).

The library is sponsoring several concerts that relate to the exhibit. The first, on May 25, features pianist Peter Duchin in cabaret classics; later installments will include an Irving Berlin program, a musical-theatre evening hosted by Kitty Carlisle Hart, and a recital of parlor songs by tenor Robert White.

The Right Decision.



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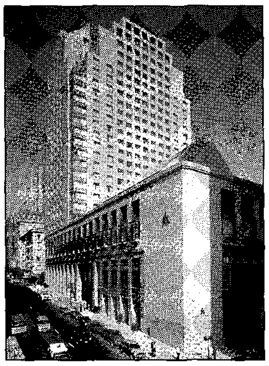

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OPERA

Cheng-wen Peking Opera Troupe—The company, which interprets traditional works with contemporary theatrical techniques, presents "The Case of Chen Shih-mei," based on a tale from the Sung Dynasty. (Taipei Theatre, 1221 Sixth Ave., at 48th St. 373-1850. May 25-27 at 7:30 and May 28 at 2.)

Elysian Opera Group—Performing ensembles from operas including Puccini's "Madama Butterfly," Strauss's "Der Rosenkavalier," Massenet's "Thaïs," Mozart's "Die Zauberflöte," and Handel's "Alcina," and arias by Poulenc, Menotti, and Bernstein. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 362-8719. May 24 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic—Kurt Masur conducting. May 24 at 8: Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto (with Sarah Chang) and Mahler's Symphony No. 1. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030.) . . . ¶ May 25-27 at 8: The same program, plus Webern's "Im Sommerwind." (Avery Fisher Hall.) . . . ¶ May 29 at 8: A free performance of Strauss's "Metamorphosen" and Beethoven's Symphony No. 3 (whose second movement included a theme that would work its way into the Strauss piece nearly a century and a half later). (Cathedral of St. John the Divine, Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St.) . . . ¶ May 30 at 6:45: Beethoven's "Egmont" Overture and his Symphony No. 3. (Avery Fisher Hall.)

New Amsterdam Singers—Performing three works by contemporary New York composers: Morton Gould's "Quotations" (1983), for double chorus, winds, and percussion; Marga Richter's "Into My Heart" (1990), for chorus and chamber orchestra; and Dennis Riley's "Raggedstone Hill" (1988), for chorus, harp, piano, and percussion. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. May 24 at 8. Tickets at the door on the night of the concert.)

New York Concert Singers—Judith Clurman directs twentieth-century American choral music by Lee Hoiby, Libby Larsen, Thomas Pasatieri, and others. (Greenwich House Music School, 46 Barrow St. 242-4770. May 25 at 8.)

City Island Baroque Ensemble—Sharon Kam is featured in clarinet quintets by Weber and Mozart. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 1-718 885-2478. May 28 at noon.)

Polish Singers Alliance of America—Composer Henryk Górecki will accompany baritone Andrzej Bachleda in a selection of his own songs and in works by Chopin. The program also includes performances by a choir of six hundred and an appearance by the Polish American Folk Dance Company. (New York Marriott Marquis, 1535 Broadway, at 46th St., sixth floor. May 28 at 3. Tickets at the door on the day of the performance.)

RECITALS

Music for Lunch—Free midday offerings. May 24 at 12:30: The St. Lawrence String Quartet plays Mendelssohn's Quartet in E-Flat Major; flutist Carol Wincenc, harpist Nancy Allen, and clarinettist David Gould join them for Ravel's Introduction and Allegro for Harp, Flute, Clarinet, and String Quartet. (Bryant Park, Sixth Ave. at 42nd St.) . . . ¶ May 26 at 12:30: The St. Lawrence, on its own. (Bryant Park.) . . . ¶ May 30 at 12:30: Organist Claudia Dumschat performs Mendelssohn's Sonata No. 6 and Bach's Toccata and Fugue in F Major. (Church of the Transfiguration, 1 E. 29th St.) . . . ¶ May 30 at 12:30: Cellist Sibylle Johner and pianist Speranza Scappucci. (Continental Insurance Atrium, 180 Maiden Lane.)

David Finckel and Wu Han—A husband-and-wife team—the cellist for the Emerson String Quartet and a pianist who has won the Andrew Wolf Chamber Music Award and is a favorite collaborator of chamber musicians—performs sonatas by Schnittke and Grieg, as well as Beethoven's "Seven Variations on a Theme from Mozart's 'Magic Flute.'" (Stuyvesant High School, 345 Chambers St. May 24 at 6:30. Tickets, which are free, will be available at the door beginning at 5.)

Ernst and Andreas Haefliger—By the time they reach seventy-five, most singers (even sopranos) have put their performing careers securely behind them. Not so the Swiss tenor Ernst Haefliger, whose claim to important roles that demand subtle interpretative facility (including, famously, the Evangelist in Bach's "St. Matthew Passion") has been, until recent seasons, incontestable. In this concert, he'll delve into a masterpiece whose impact has been known to increase as the performer's voice wanes: Schubert's "Winterreise." His accompanist ought to be sympathetic to his current strengths and weaknesses: it's his son, Andreas, who is emerging as one of his generation's notable pianists. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. May 24 at 8.)

Cecile Licad and Friends—The pianist is joined by violinist Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, violist Paul Neubauer, and cellist Antonio Meneses in a program that comprises Beethoven's A-Major Cello Sonata, Brahms's G-Major Violin Sonata, and Schumann's Piano Quartet. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. May 24 at 8.)

Bernstein's New York—Soprano Angelina Réaux, baritone Michael Sokol, and pianist Ken Noda perform songs by Leonard Bernstein that highlight his love affair with his adopted city. (New-York Historical Society, 2 W. 77th St., at Central Park W. 873-3400. May 24 at 8.)

Bargemusic—Presenting Martinů's "Three Madrigals" (for violin and viola), and piano quartets by Mendelssohn (in F Minor) and Schumann. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 1-718 624-4061. May 25 at 7:30 and May 28 at 4.)

Juilliard String Quartet Seminar—Six young quartets, most of which hold university positions as quartets-in-residence, demonstrate, in their performances of full-length masterworks, how they've profited from a week's coaching by the Juilliard String Quartet. (Paul Recital Hall, Juilliard School, 60 Lincoln Center Plaza. May 26 at 4 and 8. No tickets necessary.)

Joan Morris and William Bolcom—In the week's third all-in-the-family concert, the mezzo-soprano and the pianist, who are married, offer a program of American popular songs from the second half of the nineteenth century. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. May 26 at 7.)

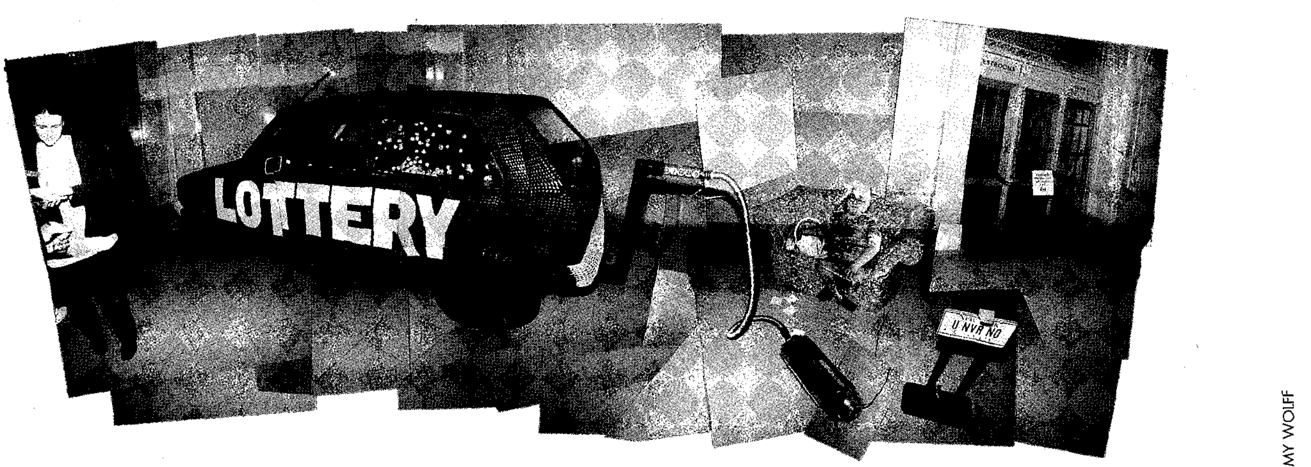
Salon Soirées—Presenting clarinet quintets by Mozart and Weber, with clarinettist Sharon Kam. (Hotel Wales, Madison Ave. at 92nd St. May 28 at 6 and 8. No tickets necessary.)

Friends & Enemies of New Music—Offering recent compositions by Ned Rorem, Daron Hagen, Susan Botti, Tom Cipullo, Ben Yarmolinsky, and Paul Siskind; with soprano Angelina Réaux, mezzo-soprano Mary Ann Hart, and baritone Michael Sokol. (Greenwich House Music School, 46 Barrow St. May 30 at 8. For information about tickets, call 749-1324.)

Chamber Music Workshop—Six aspiring chamber ensembles are participating in a three-week professional training workshop at Carnegie Hall, where they are benefitting from the guidance of such eminent practitioners as violinist Isaac Stern, cellist Janos Starker, and the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio. The public is allowed to eavesdrop on May 30-June 1 as the groups find their voices in repertoire as old as Beethoven and as new as Leon Kirchner. (For schedule and ticket information, call 247-7800.)

ALSO OF INTEREST

ROY EATON: In piano works by Chopin and Joplin. (Kosciuszko Foundation, 15 E. 65th St. 734-2130. May 24-25 at 7:30.) . . . **AGUSTÍN MARURI:** Classical guitarist. (Spanish Institute, 684 Park Ave. 628-0420. May 25 at 6.) . . . **JEFFREY DOOLEY:** Countertenor, with an instrumental ensemble. (St. Ignatius Episcopal Church, West End Ave. at 87th St. May 25 at 8. Tickets at the door on the night of the concert.) . . . **RUSSIAN CHAMBER CHORUS OF NEW YORK:** Performing works by the Siberian composer Yuri Yukechev. (Good Shepherd Church, 240 E. 31st St. May 25 at 8. For information about tickets, call 928-1402.) . . . **GRAMERCY BRASS.** (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. May 26 at 8.) . . . **BOHUSLAV MARTINŮ PHILHARMONIC:** John Rutter directs the orchestra and choruses from around the country in his Requiem. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. May 28 at 8.)



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JEREMY WOLFF

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Yugo Park—Students and alumni from the School of Visual Arts have converted the Main Waiting Room at Grand Central Terminal into a Yugo showroom of sorts. They have taken the low-end, reliably dysfunctional vehicles and come up with twenty-four high-concept retrofits that bring out the car's natural cartoonishness in refreshingly silly ways: a copper-plated Yugo submarine, a Yugo diner, a giant Yugo accordion, a Yugo confessional (in fake-oak panelling), a Yugo that feeds tennis balls to a cardboard Everett Dirksen look-alike. . . . Through May 26.

Cold Food—May 24 at noon: Urban archeologist Nan Rothschild looks at ancient leftovers in order to describe New York cuisine of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. (New York Unearthed, 17 State St. 748-8628. No tickets necessary.)

Hotfoot—National Tap Dance Day (May 25) is celebrated on Bill (Bojangles) Robinson's birthday—he would have been one hundred and seventeen this year—with footloose events around the city. May 25 at 12:30: Baakari Wilder and Soraya Benac, among others, tap to a Cajun beat. (Sony Plaza, Madison Ave. at 56th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ May 28 at 7: Savion Glover, Jimmy Slyde, and Tarik Winston lead a program honoring bandleader Lionel Hampton, tap choreographer Henry LeTang, and Broadway devil Jerry Lewis. (Haft Auditorium, Fashion Institute of Technology, 227 W. 27th St. 279-4200.)

Square Deals—More than two hundred artists display their wares at the Washington Square Art Exhibit. (May 27-29 and June 3-4, from noon to sundown.)

Let My People Show—The Israel Expo pays homage to the nation's forty-seven-year history with morning lectures and seminars, afternoon readings and performances, and evening concerts. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. For more information, call 244-3976. May 22-25, from 8 A.M. to 10 P.M., and May 26, from 8 A.M. to 2 P.M.)

Readings—May 24 at 6:30: Three fictional takes on the institution of marriage, declaimed by actors: Steve Ross reads Noël Coward's "Stop Me If You've Heard It," Tirlok Malik reads Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's "The Interview," and Jane Curtin reads Raymond Carver's "The Student's Wife." (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400.) . . . ¶ May 24 at 8: Carolyn Forché ("The Country Between Us") and Maurice Kenny ("The Mamma Poems") close their five-city tour at the Poetry Project. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door on the night of the reading.) . . . ¶ May 26 at 8: Robert Bailey, Monty Delaney, W. R. Elton, and Laura Ludwig read from their poetry. (Barnes & Noble, 4 Astor Pl. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ May 24 at 7: Playwright Suzan-Lori Parks ("The America Play") and novelist Cliff Chase ("The Hurry Up Song") read from their work. (Limbo, 47 Avenue A, at 4th St. No tickets necessary.)

Talks—May 24 at 7:30: Augusto Boal, founder of the Theatre of the Oppressed, discusses his use of Brechtian theatrical techniques as an elected official in Rio de Janeiro. (Brecht Forum, 122 W. 27th St. 242-4201.) . . . ¶ May 24 at 7: Translators Linda Coverdale, Marjolijn de Jager, and Carol Volk read from their English-language versions of novels by Patrick Chamoiseau (Martinique), Calixthe Beyala (Cameroon), and Tahar Ben Jelloun (Morocco), respectively, and discuss the recent surge of writing in former French colonies. (PEN American Center, 568 Broadway. No tickets necessary.)

Tour—May 28 at 1: Big Onion Walking Tours boats to Governors Island, the Coast Guard's local headquarters, to inspect its nineteenth-century forts, 1988 mini-summit site, and surprisingly suburban streets. For more information, call 439-1090.

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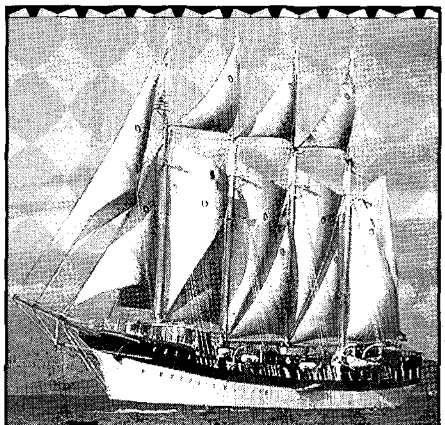

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THE MOVIES

FILMS OPENING THIS WEEK

Braveheart—Mel Gibson directs and stars in an action film about the Highlander patriot William Wallace and Scotland's fight for independence from England in the late thirteenth century. With Sophie Marceau, Patrick McGoohan, and Brendan Gleeson. Written by Randall Wallace. Opening May 24. (Village Theatre VII, 34th Street Showplace, New York Twin, East 85th Street, Chelsea Cinemas, Ziegfeld, and 84th Street Sixplex.)

Casper—The friendly ghost transmigrates from the comic book to the screen, in a comedy starring Christina Ricci, Bill Pullman, Cathy Moriarty, and Eric Idle. Directed by Brad Silberling. Written by Sherri Stoner and Deanna Oliver. Opening May 26. (First & 62nd Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, and National Twin.)

Hotel Sorrento—Australian director Richard Franklin's drama about a reunion of three sisters—a widowed mother (Carlone Gillmer), a New York executive (Tara Morice), and a London-based novelist (Caroline Goodall)—at their family home in a seaside resort south of Melbourne. With Joan Plowright, Ben Thomas, and John Hargreaves. Adapted by the director and Peter Fitzpatrick, from Hannie Rayson's 1990 play. Opening May 26. (Quad Cinema.)

Johnny Mnemonic—Keanu Reeves plays a messenger with a microchip implanted in his head, in a science-fiction feature set in the twenty-first century. With Dina Meyer, Dolph Lundgren, and Ice-T. Directed by the painter Robert Longo. Written by William Gibson, from his short story of the same name. Opening May 26. (Movieland 8th Street Tripex, 19th Street East 6, Gemini, Orpheum VII, 84th Street Sixplex, and National Twin.)

Mad Love—A movie about teen-agers desperately in love. Drew Barrymore and Chris O'Donnell are the stars, Antonia Bird ("Priest") is the director, and Paula Milne is the writer. Opening May 26. (Village East Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Sutton, 86th Street East Twin, Lincoln Square, and Embassy.)

A Pure Formality—Roman Polanski plays a police inspector who interrogates a successful novelist accused of murder (Gérard Depardieu), in a thriller directed and co-written by Giuseppe Tornatore ("Cinema Paradiso"). In French. Opening May 26. (Village East Cinemas and Carnegie Hall Cinema.)

Pushing Hands—In 1992, before he made "The Wedding Banquet" and "Eat Drink Man Woman," Ang Lee wrote and directed this drama about a seventy-year-old widowed Tai Chi master who leaves Beijing to live with his son's family in suburban New York. Opening May 26. (Cinema Village.)

Stalingrad—Director Joseph Vilsmaier's epic re-creation of the 1942 battle that marked the turning point in the fortunes of the Third Reich. Written by the director, Johannes Heide, and Jürgen Büscher. In German. Opening May 24. (Film Forum.)

Tales from the Hood—A horror movie about three teen-age hustlers (Joe Torry, De'Aundre Bonds, and Sam Monroe, Jr.) who go looking for a drug stash in the mortuary of a mysterious inner-city undertaker (Clarence Williams III). Directed by Rusty Cundieff. Written by Cundieff and Darin Scott. Opening May 24. (Manhattan Twin and Criterion Center.)

CURRENT FILMS

(The signed notes are by Bruce Diones, Sarah Kerr, Anthony Lane, and Terrence Rafferty. If a movie has been reviewed in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given. Theatre addresses and phone numbers are listed on page 28.)

Amateur—In Hal Hartley's lively and very peculiar thriller, an amnesiac (Martin Donovan), an ex-nun (Isabelle Huppert), a porn star (Elina Lowensohn), and an accountant (Damian Young) are on the lam from a sinister European arms merchant. Hartley's Godardian manner is occasionally irritating, but Huppert's delicate, surprisingly witty performance keeps the picture grounded in recognizable human emotions.—T.R. (4/17/95) (Angelika Film Center and Plaza.)

Burnt by the Sun—Set in 1936, in the high summer of Stalinist rule, Nikita Mikhalkov's movie centers on a Soviet army colonel (played by Mikhalkov) and the family group that circulates around him in an idyllic dacha. The idyll cracks when the state, in the person of a family friend (Oleg Menchikov), comes to wreak havoc. The director's eight-year-old daughter, Nadia, offers a sharp-eyed, wholly uncute performance, gazing at the unfolding events with the air of one who will never be able to banish them from her memory. The movie may sound dispiriting, but it has an amazing ability to cheer you up. In Russian.—A.L. (5/8/95) (Eastside Playhouse, Quad Cinema, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Crimson Tide—A doomsday thriller that reunites the infamous "Top Gun" team: producers Don Simpson and Jerry Bruckheimer and director Tony Scott. It's a movie for people who really miss the Cold War. Russkies are on the rampage again, and the fate of the world hangs by its customary thread. Aboard the nuclear sub U.S.S. Alabama, the captain (Gene Hackman) and the ex*ecutive officer (Denzel Washington) bicker* and take turns relieving each other of command, while—just to reassure us that old movie devices never die, and rarely even fade away—the communications officer tries frantically to fix a pesky radio. The action is loud and flashy, but there isn't really much suspense. The movie operates in such well-charted waters that it feels less like a dangerous naval mission than like a luxury cruise: the accommodations are cozy and the activities carefully planned.—T.R. (5/15/95) (Village East Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, Cinema I, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Embassy 1, and Embassy.)

Crumb—Terry Zwigoff's brilliant, scary documentary about the underground-comics artist R. Crumb. While the film is reviewing Crumb's career, from its psychedelic-era heyday to the present, and following him as he goes about his everyday activities, it's also telling a harrowing story about his damaged family. The movie is often funny, but what makes it extraordinary is that it explores, without presuming to explain, the sources of a unique and savage comic sensibility. And it shows us that Crumb's gift—the detachment that allows him to create such hilariously contemptuous images of the world around him (and inside him)—is also a kind of curse, or, at least, a nasty habit.—T.R. (5/1/95) (Film Forum 3.)

Die Hard with a Vengeance—Bruce Willis reprises his role as a New York City police detective. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) (Murray Hill Cinemas, Baronet, Coronet, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Waverly, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Olympia, and Criterion Center.)

Dirty Money—An innocent bystander (Frederick Dean), caught in a Los Angeles payroll robbery, is chased through California and into Mexico by the thieves. Dean wrote the screenplay; James Bruce directed. (Quad Cinema.)

The Englishman Who Went Up a Hill but Came Down a Mountain—Hugh Grant, who became a romantic icon with "Four Weddings and a Funeral," again unleashes his bashful-boy smile and cloaks himself in an aura of modest, befuddled sincerity. But the illusion of ease has vanished, and his charm has gone with it. Christopher Monger, the writer and director, works just as strenuously to enchant us, and, like the star, he overtaxes his lightweight virtues. For a while, this slight anecdote about a Welsh village during the First World War seems an amiable anachronism—a throwback to the eccentric-community formula of Ealing comedy. But Monger tries to pile more meaning onto his story than its fragile structure can support, and he buries the small good thing he started out with. Also with Colm Meaney, Ian McNeice, Kenneth Griffith, and Tara FitzGerald.—T.R. (5/15/95) (Village Theatre VII, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Showplace, Sutton, Orpheum VII, and Lincoln Square.)

Ermo—A Chinese peasant (Alia) takes a second job, has an affair with her neighbor, and sells her blood, all in her quest to buy the biggest TV in the village. Directed by Zhou Xiaowen. In Mandarin. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

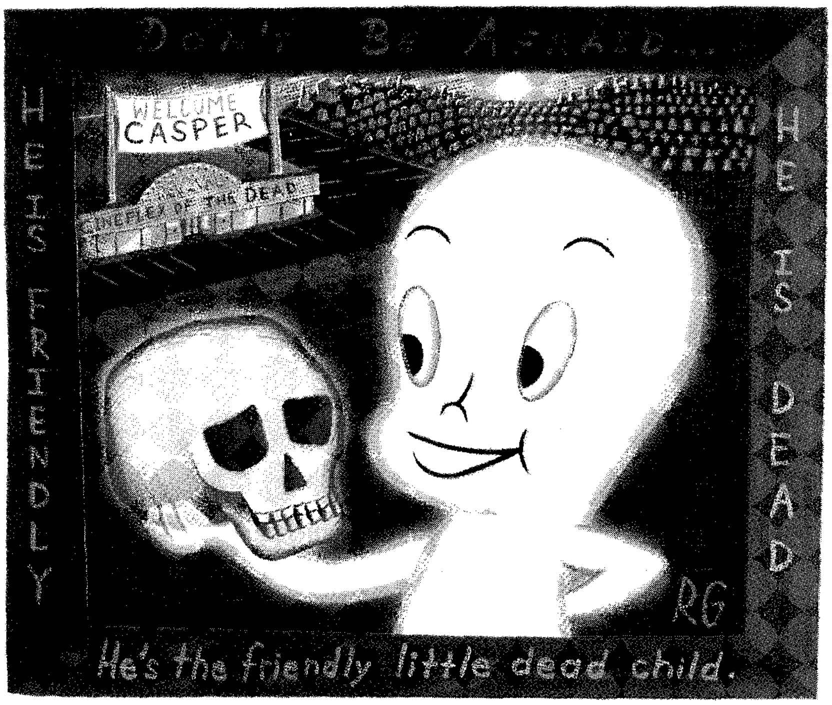
Forget Paris—A Billy Crystal movie with a vengeance: he produced, directed, and stars, as Mickey, a basketball referee who flies to Paris (or a tourist parody of Paris) and loses his heart to Ellen (Debra Winger), an airline worker. They get married, and the problems start—for them, and for the movie. Crystal and Winger make one of the great no-sparks couples in recent cinema: he cracks jokes, she looks baffled and strained. He also co-wrote, with the team of Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel, whose scripts since "Splash" (1984) have been getting less nutty and more therapeutic; this one turns into a marriage-counselling session.—A.L. (5/22/95) (Village Theatre VII, 34th St. East, Beekman, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, and Criterion Center.)

French Kiss—Meg Ryan travels to Paris to win back Timothy Hutton, who has gone off with a Frenchwoman. On the plane, she meets Kevin Kline, a French small-time crook and full-time slob. They win each other's hearts, but, boy, does it take a long time: two hours later they're just working up the courage to hold hands. (The title promises a steaminess that never arrives.) This is cinema as soufflé: light and fluffy if you do it quickly, leathery and sunken if you don't. The director, Lawrence Kasdan, doesn't. (How did the hazy shots of vineyards or the discussion of visa applications make it through the final cut?) The best reason to stick around is Kline's broad, shrugging pastiche of a Frenchman—the dumbest role in the picture, and the only performance that comes alive.—A.L. (5/22/95) (Movieland 8th Street Triplex, Murray Hill Cinemas, Gotham Cinema, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, Regency, and Embassy.)

Friday—Ice Cube stars in a comedy he co-wrote (with D.J. Pooh) about life in South Central Los Angeles. With Chris Tucker. Directed by Gary Gray. (19th Street East 6, 86th Street East Twin, 84th Street Sixplex, and Criterion Center. . . . ¶ Movieland 8th Street Triplex and Gemini; through May 25.)

Gordy—Country-music singer Doug Stone stars in a family comedy about a piglet who sets out to save his parents and siblings from the slaughterhouse and becomes a national celebrity. With Kristy Young, Michael Roescher, and Tom Lester. Directed by Mark Lewis. (Village East Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, 23rd St. West Triplex, and Lincoln Square.)

Jefferson in Paris—The subject of Thomas Jefferson's five years as ambassador to France is so rich and engaging that it should be impossible to make a dull film about it; nevertheless, the producing and directing team of Ismail Merchant and James Ivory have pulled it off. The period detail is numbing, and Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's script sounds like a stash of letters being read aloud. Nothing sparks between Nick Nolte, as Jefferson, and Greta Scacchi, as the married woman with whom he is in love, and the high point of his ardor for the black maid with whom he is alleged to have had an affair (Thandie Newton) is the furtive unbuckling of a shoe. When Gwyneth Paltrow, who plays Jefferson's impatient daughter, tears off her fancy wig and stuffs it into a vase, we know just how she feels.—A.L. (Paris.)



Opening May 26, "Casper."

RODNEY ALLEN GREENBLATT

Kiss of Death—Barbet Schroeder's workmanlike remake of the 1947 crime melodrama, about the perils of a small-time New York crook who becomes a stool pigeon. Despite a wonderful cast—which includes David Caruso (as the sensitive squealer), Helen Hunt, Samuel L. Jackson, and Stanley Tucci—and a crafty, low-key screenplay by Richard Price, the picture feels a little lethargic. Only Nicolas Cage, who plays the chief villain—a positive-thinking, bodybuilding thug named Little Junior—manages to dispel the over-all air of weary professionalism.—T.R. (5/1/95) (First & 62nd Cinemas, Art Greenwich Twin, 23rd St. West Triplex, and Lincoln Square.)

Little Odessa—In James Gray's directorial début, Tim Roth plays a hit man for the Russian mob, who returns to his home in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, for one final job. With Edward Furlong, Moira Kelly, Vanessa Redgrave, and Maximilian Schell. Written by the director. (Village Theatre VII and 84th Street Sixplex.)

A Little Princess—A movie based on a children's classic by Frances Hodgson Burnett. Directed by Alfonso Cuarón. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) (Village Theatre VII, 19th Street East 6, Gemini, Orpheum VII, Lincoln Square, Olympia, and Criterion Center.)

My Family—Like Gregory Nava's first feature, "El Norte," this portrait of three generations of a Mexican-American clan in East Los Angeles occasionally goes haywire on sentiment. The big-canvas approach works best at capturing the way large immigrant families produce utterly disparate people who are nevertheless helplessly connected. Though the supporting cast is spotty, Eduardo Lopez Rojas is exceptionally fine as the patriarch, a befuddled and repressed optimist; Esai Morales smolders charismatically as his luckless son; and Jimmy Smits, playing an ex-con, overcomes some implausible dialogue to get at the sweetness and hurt underneath his macho shell. With Edward James Olmos. Written by Nava and Anna Thomas.—S.K. (Village East Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, New York Twin, Lincoln Square, and Criterion Center.)

Panther—A fascinating, completely hysterical dramatization of the founding and the demise of the Black Panthers movement. Kadeem Hardison plays Judge, a catatonic Vietnam vet who is singled out as a confidant by Bobby Seale (Courtney B. Vance) and Huey Newton (Marcus Chong) and as a potential informant by an F.B.I. agent (Joe Don Baker), and who functions as a Nick Carraway-style ambivalent observer. The father-and-son team of Melvin (writer) and Mario (director) Van Peebles throws in everything plus ten kitchen sinks: real and simulated documentary footage, gratuitous punches and gunshots in glorious surround-sound, buddy-movie elements in the interaction of Bobby and Huey. By the end, Judge is an action hero dodging pigs and revolutionary hotheads—as well as the mob, the F.B.I., and a drug-dealing black Judas, who have conspired to annihilate the Panthers by flooding the ghetto with heroin. With Dick Gregory as a gentle minister, Anthony Griffith as Eldridge Cleaver, and the fresh young Wesley Jonathan as Little Bobby Hutton; Mario Van Peebles appears in a rally scene as Stokely Carmichael.—S.K. (Village Theatre VII, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Showplace, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, 84th Street Sixplex, and Astor Plaza.)

The Perez Family—Juan Perez (Alfred Molina), a newly released Cuban political prisoner on his way to Miami to find Carmela Perez (Anjelica Huston), the wife he hasn't seen for twenty years, is identified through a clerical error as the husband of a passionate young refugee named Dottie Perez (Marisa Tomei). Directed by Mira Nair ("Mississippi Masala," "Salaam Bombay!"). Written by Robin Swicord, from Christine Bell's 1991 novel. (Village Theatre VII, First & 62nd Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, and Lincoln Square. . . . ¶ Embassy; through May 25.)

Picture Bride—A nice-looking, earnest feminist lesson, about a young Japanese woman (Youki Kudoh) who enters into an arranged marriage with a sugarcane cutter (Akira Takayama) in Hawaii in 1918. The picture examines the role of the Japanese contract laborers in the early part of this century and the limited choices available to the women who joined them. Although the director, Kayo Hatta, and her co-writer (and sister), Mari Hatta, have added some Hawaiian folklore and a little Magic Realism, the characters are stereotyped composites of sociohistorical forces. Even as history, though, this film fails to answer the most basic question: what was it like to bend over all day in a hot field cutting sugarcane? In Japanese and English.—S.K. (Angelika Film Center and 68th St. Playhouse.)

Search and Destroy—This vibrantly colored film by the painter David Salle, about the dirty doings of a would-be Hollywood producer, has surprising snap. Dennis Hopper plays the author of an "Iron John"-like best-seller, and Griffin Dunne turns in a rare good performance as a lost soul willing to do whatever it takes to purchase the rights. John Turturro, Christopher Walken, and, especially, Illeana Douglas are strikingly crazy as characters who get involved in his scheme. Michael Almereyda's hip script, based on Howard Korder's play, isn't all it should be; the ending seems Tarantinoized, but it's impressive.—B.D. (Angelika Film Center and Angelika 57.)

Swimming with Sharks—When Kevin Spacey, as a movie producer from hell, tells an abused assistant to fetch, he oozes the sweet smell of success; his performance is a triumph of nastiness. But when his new assistant (Frank Whaley) decides to fight back and torture his boss, Spacey's character loses his fizz, and the movie becomes a revenge fantasy smothered by a colorless, driven twerp. Written and directed by George Huang.—B.D. (Art Greenwich Twin and Carnegie Hall Cinema.)

While You Were Sleeping—Trouble on the tracks: Sandra Bullock is a sad and lonely subway clerk (yeah, right) who drags a handsome customer (Peter Gallagher) away from an oncoming train. She's in love with him, but he's in a coma, and his brother (Bill Pullman) falls in love with *her*. Out of this pleasing confusion the director, Jon Turteltaub, has fashioned something so simple and predictable that you have no option but to submit. The required resolution is a long time in coming, but there's plenty to keep you diverted, including the light backchat among the semi-weirdos who make up the brothers' family, and Bullock's ridiculously watchable performance. She knows one of the secrets of doing romantic comedy: treating the romance as a good joke.—A.L. (5/22/95) (Village East Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Murray Hill Cinemas, Cinema II, 86th Street East Twin, Guild, and Lincoln Square.)

ALSO PLAYING

BAD BOYS: Movieland 8th Street Triplex, 34th Street Showplace, 23rd St. West Triplex, 84th Street Sixplex, and National Twin. . . . **THE BASKETBALL DIARIES:** Village East Cinemas. . . . **BEFORE THE RAIN** (reviewed in our issue of 3/13/95): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE BROKEN JOURNEY:** Quad Cinema. . . . **CIRCLE OF FRIENDS:** First & 62nd Cinemas and 62nd & Broadway. . . . **DON JUAN DE MARCO** (4/10/95): Movieland 8th Street Triplex and Cinema 3rd Avenue. . . . **DREAMING OF RITA:** Quad Cinema. . . . **EXOTICA:** Angelika Film Center. . . . **FARINELLI:** Carnegie Hall Cinema. . . . **FORREST GUMP** (7/25/94): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **FUNNY BONES:** Village East Cinemas. . . . **HEAVENLY CREATURES** (11/21/94): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **LEGENDS OF THE FALL** (1/9/95): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE MADNESS OF KING GEORGE** (1/16/95): Cinema 3 and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **MURIEL'S WEDDING:** Village East Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **THE MUSIC ROOM:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **NOBODY'S FOOL:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **ONCE WERE WARRIORS:** Angelika Film Center. . . . **PRIEST** (3/27/95): Angelika Film Center, Sutton, and 23rd St. West Triplex. . . . **PROFESSION: NEO-NAZI:** Cinema Village. . . . **PULP FICTION** (10/10/94): 59th Street East Cinemas. . . . **ROB ROY** (4/17/95): First & 62nd Cinemas and Metro Cinema. . . . **THE SECRET OF ROAN INISH:** Quad Cinema. . . . **THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION** (9/26/94): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE STRANGER:** Quad Cinema. . . . **THE UNDERNEATH:** Tower East. . . . **VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED:** First & 62nd Cinemas, Art Greenwich Twin, and National Twin. . . . **WINGS OF COURAGE** (4/24/95): Lincoln Square. . . . **THE WORLD OF APU:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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EAST SIDE

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St. (995-2000).
Little Theatre, Public Theatre, 425 Lafayette St. (598-7171).
Movieland 8th Street Triplex, 36 E. 8th (477-6600).
Village Theatre VII, 3rd Ave. at 11th (982-0400).
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th (924-3363).
Village East Cinemas, 2nd Ave. at 12th (529-6799).
19th Street East 6, B'way at 19th (260-8000).
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th (689-6548).
34th Street Showplace, 238 E. 34th (532-5544).
34th St. East, 241 E. 34th (683-0255).
Eastside Playhouse, 3rd Ave. at 55th (755-3020).
Sutton 1 and 2, 3rd Ave. at 57th (759-1411).
Gotham Cinema, 3rd Ave. at 58th (759-2262).
Plaza, 42 E. 58th (355-3320).
Manhattan Twin, 3rd Ave. at 59th (935-6420).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th (759-4630).
Baronet and Coronet, 3rd Ave. at 59th (355-1663).
Cinema I, Cinema II, and Cinema 3rd Avenue, 3rd Ave. at 60th (753-6022).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd (513-5408).
Gemini 1 and 2, 2nd Ave. at 64th (832-1670).
Beekman, 2nd Ave. at 66th (737-2622).
New York Twin, 2nd Ave. at 67th (744-7339).
68th St. Playhouse, 3rd Ave. at 68th (734-0302).
Tower East, 3rd Ave. at 71st (879-1313).
East 85th Street, 1st Ave. at 85th (249-5100).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th (534-1880).
Orpheum VII, 3rd Ave. at 86th (876-2400).
86th Street East Twin, 3rd Ave. at 86th (249-1144).

WEST SIDE

Film Forum, 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110).
Waverly 1 and 2, 6th Ave. at 3rd (929-8037).
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th (929-3350).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th (255-8800).
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd (513-5402).
23rd St. West Triplex, 333 W. 23rd (989-0060).
Guild, 33 W. 50th (757-2406).
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St., between 8th and 9th Aves. (504-0960).
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th (765-7600).
Carnegie Hall Cinemas, 7th Ave. between 56th and 57th (265-2520).
Angelika 57, 225 W. 57th (586-1900).
Paris, 4 W. 58th (980-5656).
Cinema 3, 2 W. 59th (752-5959).
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd (265-7466).
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, B'way at 63rd (757-2280).
Regency, B'way at 67th (724-3700).
Lincoln Square, B'way at 68th (336-5000).
84th Street Sixplex, B'way at 84th (877-3600).
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, B'way at 99th (222-1200).
Olympia I and II, B'way at 107th (865-8128).

TIMES SQUARE AREA

Criterion Center, B'way at 44th (354-0900).
Embassy 1, B'way at 46th (302-0494).
Embassy 2, 3, and 4, 7th Ave. at 47th (730-7262).
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at B'way (869-8340).
National Twin, B'way at 44th (869-0950).

REVIVALS

(The following notes are by Pauline Kael and Michael Sragow. Theatre addresses and phone numbers appear with the listings following these notes.)

Blue Steel (1990)—The director, Kathryn Bigelow, followed her enveloping vampire movie, "Near Dark," with this catastrophic N.Y.P.D. melodrama. (She co-wrote both films with Eric Red.) Jamie Lee Curtis plays a rookie who empties a full load into an armed robber on her first day out, which somehow triggers a witness (Ron Silver)—a Wall Street hot shot—into filching the crook's gun and taking up serial killing. The plot crashes at the intersection of Coincidence and Improbability, and not even Bigelow's clammy, dislocating visual style can tow it through. There's a pitiful attempt to motivate Curtis's career choice with a subplot featuring Philip Bosco as her wife-beating dad and Louise Fletcher as her dazed mom. Elizabeth Peña, vibrant as always, heists a few scenes as Curtis's best friend.—M.S. (Museum of Modern Art; May 25.)

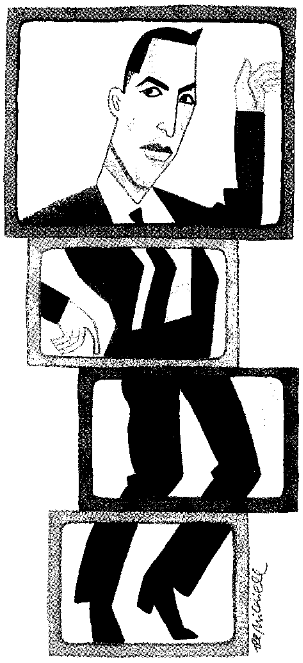
A Hard Day's Night (1964)—A satiric celebration of anarchic youth and the blast of oxygen they give a wheezing kingdom. The director, Richard Lester, and the screenwriter, Alun Owen, set out to show how the Beatles' phenomenal fame encased them in a cocoon. But the Fab Four aren't larvae—they're brilliant butterflies, and they have an unsurpassed rapport with their fans and the movie audience, too. Lester directs fearlessly, shooting them every which way to capture their antic poetry. The nonchalant iconoclast John Lennon "snorts" a Coke bottle; Paul McCartney, in a bowler hat and fake beard, clowns like an aristocratic elf. Ringo Starr becomes the group's hangdog mascot, George Harrison its pocket of moodiness. Wilfrid Brambell provides delightful counterpoint as Paul's grandfather, a "clean old man." Lester devised strategies for making rock visual that music-video directors have been stealing for decades. In one of the most glorious musical numbers in movie history, the Beatles break out of their keepers' care and zigzag through a field to the tune of "Can't Buy Me Love."—M.S. (Museum of Modern Art; May 26.)

Hue and Cry (1947)—A farce about working-class kids who crack a criminal code and foil the plans of an adult gang. It peaks at the beginning, as youths tumble merrily over walls covered with the opening credits scrawled as graffiti. Except for the introduction of Alastair Sim, as an easily flattered—and easily frightened—writer of juvenile detective stories, both the humor and the mystery lack edge and surprise. It's a pleasant but innocuous picture; the euphoric climax, with boys swarming over London's bombed-out dockland, deserves a better buildup. T. E. B. Clarke wrote the script, and Charles Crichton directed; their heyday was just around the corner. With Valerie White, Harry Fowler, and Jack Warner; cinematography by Douglas Slocombe; music by Georges Auric.—M.S. (Film Forum 2; starting May 30.)

Kind Hearts and Coronets (1949)—Ninth in line to inherit a dukedom, the insouciant young hero (Dennis Price) systematically eliminates the intervening eight—all, by a casting stroke of genius, played by Alec Guinness. Secure in the knowledge that Guinness will return in another form, the audience suffers no regret as each abominable D'Ascoyne is coolly dispatched. With purring little Joan Greenwood as the minx-nemesis Sybilla, Valeria Hobson as the high-minded Edith, Miles Malleson as the poetasting executioner. Robert Hamer directed.—P.K. (Film Forum 2; May 26-28.)

Lacombe, Lucien (1974)—About a boy who has an empty space where feelings beyond the purely instinctual are expected to be. The time is 1944, and the boy—a French peasant—goes to work each day hunting down and torturing people for the Gestapo. The director, Louis Malle, casts as Lucien a teen-age country boy (Pierre Blaise) who can respond to events with his own innocence, apathy, and animal shrewdness. Malle's gamble is that the cameras will discover what the artist's imagination can't, and, steadily, startlingly, the gamble pays off. Without ever mentioning the subject of innocence and guilt, this extraordinary film, in its calm, dispassionate way, addresses it on a very deep level. In French.—P.K. (Museum of Modern Art; May 26 and 29.)

Persona (1967)—Ingmar Bergman gives us a movie within a movie, but he seems hardly to have made the enclosing movie, and then he throws away the inner one. It's a pity, because the inner movie had begun to involve us in marvellous possibilities: an actress (Liv Ullmann) who has abandoned the power of speech is put in the care of a nurse (Bibi Andersson), and the nurse, like an analysand who becomes furious at the silence of the analyst, begins to vent her own emotional disturbances. The two women look very much alike, and Bergman plays with this resemblance photographically by suggestive combinations and superimpositions. Most movies give so little that it seems almost barbarous to object to Bergman's not giving us more in "Persona," but it is just because of the expressiveness and fascination of what we are given that the movie is so frustrating. In Swedish.—P.K. (Walter Reade Theatre; May 28 and 30.)



Opening May 26, Keanu Reeves in "Johnny Mnemonic."

ROBERT DEMICHELL

LATE RUNS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

Film Forum 2, 209 W. Houston St. (727-8110)—Through May 25: A program of eleven Betty Boop shorts, made by Max and Dave Fleischer in Manhattan in the early thirties. . . . ¶ A program of comedies produced at the Ealing Studios. May 26-28: "Kind Hearts and Coronets" (†). . . . May 29: "Went the Day Well?" (1943, Alberto Cavalcanti) and "Nine Men" (1943, Harry Watt). . . . From May 30: "Hue and Cry" (†) and "A Run for Your Money" (1949, Charles Frend).

Little Theatre, Public Theatre, 425 Lafayette St. (598-7171)—Through May 31, a program titled "Crossroads: The North African and Middle East Film Festival."

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—May 25 at 2:30 and May 26 at 6: "Eating Raoul" (1982, Paul Bartel). . . . ¶ May 25 at 3 and 6: "Drancy: A Concentration Camp in Paris, 1941-44" (1994, Stephen Trombley). . . . ¶ May 25 at 6: "Stella Dallas" (1926, Henry King; silent). . . . ¶ May 25 at 8:15: "Blue Steel" (†). . . . ¶ May 26 at 2:30 and May 27 at 5: "Opening Night" (1977, John Cassavetes). . . . ¶ May 26 at 3 and May 30 at 6: "The World Belongs to Us" (1937, Martin Fric; in Czech). . . . ¶ May 26 at 6: "A Hard Day's Night" (†). . . . ¶ May 26 at 8 and May 29 at 2: "Lacombe, Lucien" (†). . . . ¶ May 26 at 8 and May 30 at 3: "Sven Klang's Combo" (1976, Stellan Olsson; in Swedish). . . . ¶ May 27 at 1: "Under the Roofs of Paris" (1929, René Clair; in French). . . . ¶ May 27 at 2: "A Perfect World" (1993, Clint Eastwood). . . . ¶ May 27 at 3: "Your Money or Your Life" (1932, Jindrich Honzl; in Czech). . . . ¶ May 27 at 5: "Face Powder and Gas" (1931, Honzl; in Czech). . . . ¶ May 28 at 1: "The Godfather" (1972, Francis Ford Coppola). . . . ¶ May 28 at 1:30 and May 29 at 2: "Oliver!" (1968, Carol Reed). . . . ¶ May 28 at 5: "The Godfather Part II" (1974, Coppola). . . . ¶ May 28 at 5: "Evergreen" (1935, Victor Saville). . . . ¶ May 29 at 5 and May 30 at 2:30: "Shakespeare Wallah" (1965, James Ivory). . . . ¶ May 29 at 5: "Louise" (1939, Abel Gance; in French). . . . ¶ May 30 at 6: "Point of Order" (1964, Emile de Antonio and Dan Talbot).

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center, 165 W. 65th St., plaza level (875-5600)—A retrospective of Ingmar Bergman's films is being presented (through June 15), while the Museum of Television and Radio (see below) shows his work for the small screen. May 24 at 2, 6, and 9:45: "The Virgin Spring" (1959). . . . May 24 at 4 and 7:45: "The Magician" (1958). . . . May 25 at 2 and 9 and May 26 at 4 and 7:45: "The Devil's Eye" (1960). . . . May 25 at 4 and May 26 at 2, 6, and 9:30: "Through a Glass Darkly" (1962). . . . May 27-28 at 2: Short films directed by Bergman. . . . May 27 at 4 and 7:45 and May 29 at 2, 5:45, and 9:30: "Winter Light" (1962). . . . May 27 at 5:45 and 9:30 and May 29 at 3:45 and 7:30: "The Silence" (1963). . . . May 28 at 4 and 7:30 and May 30 at 2, 6, and 9:30: "Persona" (†). . . . May 28 at 5:45 and 9:15 and May 30 at 3:45 and 7:45: "All These Women" (1964). . . . ¶ May 25 at 6:30: "The Four Corners of Nowhere" (1994, Steve Chbosky).

Museum of Television and Radio, 25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—A retrospective of Ingmar Bergman's television work (through July 2), in conjunction with the Walter Reade's film retrospective (see above). May 24-26 at 2:15: "The Last Gasp" (1995). . . . May 25 at 5:30 and May 26 at 6: "Ingmar Bergman Bids Farewell to Cinema" (1983). . . . May 25 at 6:30 and May 26 at 7: "The Blessed Ones" (1986). . . . May 27 at 1: "The Open Mind: A Profile of Ingmar Bergman" (1965). . . . May 27-28 at 2: "Scenes from a Marriage" (1973). . . . May 28 at 1: "The Bergman File" (1977). . . . May 30 at 2: "The Magic Flute" (1975).

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (1-718 784-0077)—A program of films by Nicholas Ray. May 27-28 at 2: "Johnny Guitar" (1954). . . . May 27-28 at 4: "The Savage Innocents" (1960).

A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St. (989-4850)—A Saturday-and-Sunday-night series of free films (and popcorn). On May 27 at 7, the feature will be Sandra Bernhard's "Without You I'm Nothing" (1990); on May 28 at 7, John Waters' "Desperate Living" (1977).

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—May 30 at 12:30, 3:15, 6, and 8:45: "Stavisky" (1974, Alain Resnais; in French), with Jean-Paul Belmondo and Charles Boyer.

Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5181)—May 25 at 8 and 10, May 26 at 9, May 27 at 2 and 10, and May 28 at 2, 8, and 10: "Pickup's Tricks" (1973, George Pickup). . . . ¶ May 26 at 8 and May 27 at 4: "Paradjanov: The Last Spring" (1994, Mikhail Varranov; in Russian). . . . ¶ May 27 at 8: "Time Reality Works" (1995, Augis Varkalis). . . . ¶ May 27 at 8: "Ice" (1970, Robert Kramer). . . . ¶ May 28 at 6: A work each by Dwinell Grant, Ken Jacobs, and Hollis Frampton.

Whitney Museum, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Through June 4, the 1995 Biennial Exhibition, presenting films and videos from the past two years. Call for schedule and screening times.

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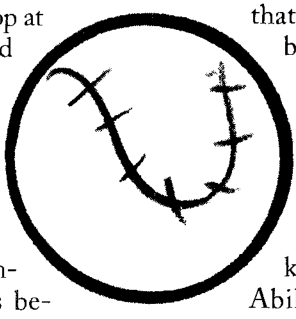
THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

TAKE ME OUT TO THE BLACKTOP

Last week, scarcely an hour after a thick bank of clouds suddenly parted to reveal a glorious spring evening, a bespectacled grandmother named Jeanette Acosta toed a white stripe on the blacktop at P.S. 191, at Amsterdam and Sixtieth, rocked back in the classic underhand style, and tossed out a ceremonial first pitch that reached the plate and then some. The girlfriends, moms, old-timers, and homies standing on the steps beyond left field broke into cheers, the players charged out onto the field, and the Blacktop Softball League, which has been quartered on the P.S. 191 playground since 1953, got under way once again.



Blacktop softball, which is played under various names throughout the five boroughs, is the quintessential city game—a cramped, speeded-up version of a lazy, pastoral sport. The peculiar rules of the game involve an adaptation to confined space. Since the fences surrounding the P.S. 191 playground are, at most, two hundred and fifty feet away—a chip shot for neighborhood palookas—anything hit out of the park is not a homer but an out. Another rule, according to Patrick Abikarram, who runs the league with his wife, Deborah, is "If it gets stuck in the Dumpster"—currently parked in mid-right field—"it's one base."

The Blacktop Softball League is not only a curious sports mutation but a sustaining communal activity. The league draws many of its players, mostly Latino but also black and white, from Amsterdam Houses, a project that runs from Sixty-first Street to Sixty-fourth. Abikarram, who is thirty, grew up in the neighborhood and played in the league as a teen-ager; he re-started it last year after a lapse of a decade or so. "I wanted to bring back the family atmosphere that used to be in the neighborhood," he said. This was Abikarram's delicate way of saying that some of the young men in the neighborhood needed a healthy outlet during the long summer evenings to keep them out of trouble. Abikarram also has a strong sense of history for someone his age. Jeanette Acosta's father, Frankie (Pacún) Acosta, was the Walter Johnson of the league's early years and, later, a beloved veteran. Pacún died of a stroke last July, and Abikarram decided to dedicate this season to his memory. He even worked Pacún's name and his number—13—into the logo on the players' T-shirts.

The game itself started slowly. Players on both sides, juiced up for Opening Day, kept launching spectacular outs over the right-field fence into Sixtieth Street. The game was briefly delayed when a dog caught up with a shot over left field, and its owner had to chase it all over the playground in order to wrench the ball from its teeth. Robert Rosario, a veteran from the Age of Pacún, stood on the steps holding the ceremonial first beer, a can of Country Club malt liquor, and shaking his head at the wasteful display of muscle. "You gotta hit it on the *floor*," he explained. "They're not *place* hitters." Last year, he said, the old-timers' all-star team had "slaughtered" the champions, It's On. The final tally had been 3–2.

Between the confines of the diamond and the flawless glovework and strong arms of the fielders, hits were almost impossible to come by. Finally, the X-Men—a new team, composed mainly of players from the nearby St. Luke's / Roosevelt Hospital Center—broke through for three runs in the fifth with a couple of scorching shots down the third-base line. The roof might have caved in altogether had it not been for a tremendous peg from left that caught a runner sliding in—*yeeowch!*—at home. Many, but not all, of the participants wear kneepads, since players are expected to give up their bodies. "You don't slide, you don't play in this league," one of the fans said.

The sun was now sinking below the upper edge of P.S. 191, a perfect, grimy example of the prison style of postwar school architecture. Pacún's widow, Carmen, who lives across the street, had finished babysitting her great-granddaughter and was now standing on the steps, proudly holding the softball, inscribed with the date, that her daughter had thrown out. Photographs of last year's all-star game were being passed around. Ba-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROBERT RISKO

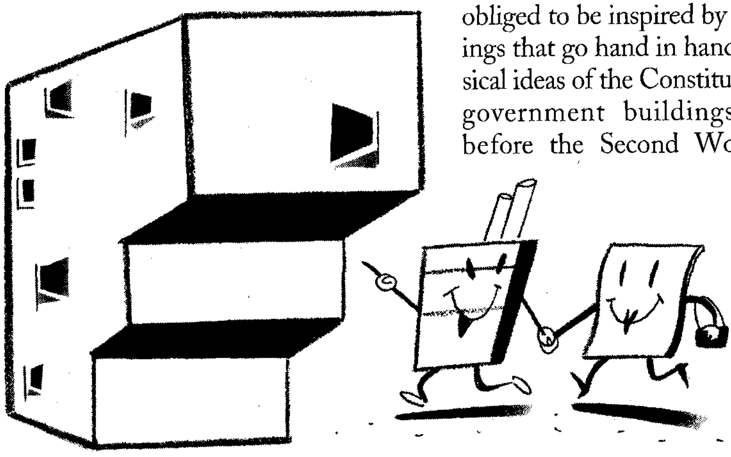
bies were being passed around. Old-timers were chatting in Spanish. Down on the field, It's On launched a rally in the last of the seventh, the game's final inning. The X-Men shortstop, David Murzi, appeared to bobble a routine grounder to short, and Joey Lugo, It's On's player-manager, barrelled in from first, rounded second, and was immediately tagged out: Murzi had faked an error to sucker his old friend, whose adventurous baserunning habits he had known for years. And that was your ballgame—X-Men over It's On, 4–1.

The loss came as a shock to the defending champs. The It's On center fielder, Richie Christie, a rangy kid with a scraggly orange goatee, stood in the gathering gloom and summoned up a timeless sports cliché. "It's nothing but a wake-up call," he said. "Now we got to come playing prepared."

COINCIDENTALLY

Given that Philip Morris Companies, Inc., has hosted a branch of the Whitney Museum at its corporate headquarters since 1983 and that it sponsored this year's Whitney Biennial, it wasn't so surprising that at the press conference announcing the 1995 show the museum's director, David Ross, made a speech in praise of its patron. Still, the relationship this year turns out, serendipitously, to be especially friendly. "Coffee and Cigarettes," a short film by Jim Jarmusch, features Tom Waits and Iggy Pop—smoking, talking about the pleasures of smoking, making light of their attempts to quit smoking—and a pack of Marlboros (a Philip Morris brand) prominently displayed on a table. "Craft," a video by Cheryl Donegan, features extreme closeups of an American-cheese sandwich. Kraft Foods, Inc., the maker of Kraft Singles, is one of Philip Morris's six principal operating companies. Oddly, slices of American cheese also figure in an installation by Jason Rhoades: they are draped over a hand truck, a pedestal, and other objects scattered throughout the piece.

Paranoid corporate-conspiracy theorists may be forgiven if they took seriously what Geoffrey Bible, the C.E.O. of Philip Morris, wrote in the show's catalogue: that the 1995 Biennial was "a reflection of the present, and a harbinger of things to come."



ARCHITECTS AND OKLAHOMA CITY

People who have talked with the bombing suspect Timothy McVeigh report that he didn't randomly choose the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City as the target of his bomb. Federal officials say that its large glass surfaces and proximity to the street made it particularly vulnerable. In the aftermath, architects must balance traditional aesthetic aspirations with the demand, now greater than ever, that buildings be safe, even from terrorists.

Robert A. M. Stern: Security has nothing to do with how you approach architecture. Security has to do with access. I've worked on embassies, and we now know: ever since the marines were blown up in Lebanon, cars can't come under an occupied part of the building. When you're designing for the federal government, you're obliged to be inspired by classical buildings that go hand in hand with the classical ideas of the Constitution. The great government buildings we put up before the Second World War had a dimension of inspiration that the buildings built after the war don't have. The new ones are meaner. They're diagrammatic. That building in Oklahoma City was a prototypical blank box—low ceilings, few amenities. It says we shelve our federal workers. When you go up the steps of the courthouse in downtown Manhattan, you think twice about the jury experience. It's inspiring, even awe-inspiring. And you can't ride up the steps in your Ryder truck. Those things count.

Charles Gwathmey: I've always said that the greatest architecture has produced great ruins. I'm interested in the idea of archeology—for me, the notion of fragments has architectural interest and implication. But the way the federal building in Oklahoma City has become a ruin is philosophically unacceptable to me. If the principles of aesthetics are going to adjust because of a threat, you're buying into the idea that this kind of terrorism is going to be with us. To make bombproof buildings, you'd have to reinvestigate subterranean environments that aren't about natural light. Historically, architecture is symbolic of the aspirations of a culture. If you rearrange your aspirations and make subterranean buildings, the obligation is to design the site—the environment you enclose and the landscaping on the roof. Anything is an opportunity. But I'd resist that.

Laurinda Spear & Bernardo Fort-Brescia: We designed an embassy for the State Department at a time when security was the most important issue for American facilities abroad. Our understanding and response to these concerns affected functional arrangement, form, and materials. We never thought we would have to design terrorism-conscious buildings within our own country, but that may become reality now, after Oklahoma City. We will be faced with the difficult job of communicating something inspirational when in fact there is the architectural equivalent of a bulletproof vest behind the façade.

Frank Gehry: Mine is an architecture of optimism. I can't look at it any other way. I did an embassy project in Damascus, and, as it must be, the bunker mentality was pervasive. I understood that it was practical, but I didn't find it heartening or easy to relate to. Now I'm building a Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, and there have been some expressions of anger against an American architect building a government-funded project. I hope, as the building goes up, that these feelings will change. The dream that we can design ourselves to safety is unrealistic. I don't think you can protect people. By the time you close off one bombing possibility, someone will figure out a new trick.

OPEN MOUTH, INSERT FOOT

“WE'RE not interested if people are trying to be funny,” Kurt Andersen, who is one of the three writers of “Loose Lips,” a revue that opened last Thursday at a refurbished showplace on West Seventy-second Street called the Triad supper club, observed the other day.

“We're not putting words into people's mouths,” another writer, Lisa Birnbach, said.

“We're giving it a context,” explained Andersen, dry as chalk in a collarless white shirt.

Popping the balloon of civility, Jamie Malanowski, the third writer, added sadly, “And if they are humiliated in the process, well . . .”

“Loose Lips” is made up of real-life words, most of them originally uttered by the famous and/or powerful, some of them whittled out of transcripts, and all of them brought back to life by a troupe of actors. Pieces go back in time to an eerie Nixonian gem unearthed by the guest host, Harry Shearer, and come up to the minute with Mickey Rourke and Charlie Sheen as preening poets. “Loose Lips” specializes not in quick cuts but in slow bruises. But you have to know just how far to go too far—the phrase was Jean Cocteau's—and the bit that was exercising the trio right up until the opening was a chunk in which Ronald Reagan, an amiable puppet uttering lines apparently written by Samuel Beckett, was failing to recall the least thing about a missile deal with Iran. The piece had worked during tryouts, but that was before the announcement that Reagan had Alzheimer's, and the writers fretted that the darkly comic might now seem merely dark.

It should come as no surprise that “Loose Lips” was born when Andersen and Malanowski were both at the magazine *Spy*. “It was an idea we were kicking around,” Malanowski, a writer at *Spy*, said. “That was the fetus,” Andersen, one of *Spy's* founder-editors and now the editor-in-chief of *New York*, agreed. Before leaving *Spy*, Andersen worked on a couple of television pilots of a satirical sort, during one of which he found a fruitful co-worker in Lisa Birnbach, who is still best known for her manual of the posh backlash, “The Official Preppy Handbook.” Malanowski also had a side project: he was working on a play with the Tony- and Grammy-winning director Martin Charnin. In due course, Malanowski brought the notion of a Gothic documentary to Charnin's attention. “He was skeptical,” Andersen said of Charnin. “And he became less skeptical.”

Charnin is now the director of “Loose Lips,” from which the crepuscular Ronald Reagan number has indeed been cut. “Turnover will be considerable—if the show works,” Andersen promised. Are they anticipating problems from their targets?

“No! No!” Andersen barked, hardened from the *Spy* trenches. Birnbach added sweetly, “One of our lawyers invested in the show.”

THE WOMAN WHO SHOT WARHOL

FEMINIST perspectives change, but SCUM remains the same. SCUM—the acronym stands for Society for Cutting Up Men—was founded in the late sixties by the now legendary lesbian separatist Valerie Solanas, who died of emphysema in 1988, and who had been SCUM's sole member during her lifetime. Since then, Solanas's SCUM manifesto has garnered a large cult following, partly because of the ideas she expounded, like creating a “swinging,” all-female world by eliminating the world of men. But it was her brief appearance in “I, a Man,” directed by Andy Warhol, and her attempt, in 1968, to assassinate Warhol by firing three bullets at him—one passed through his stomach and chest—that finally afforded Solanas the fame she had sought through her work.

“He had too much control of my life,” Solanas said when she gave herself up for arrest. This issue of control, and of the price paid for following the sometimes skewed road leading toward self-invention, is among the themes now being grappled with by Mary Harron, in her first feature film, “I Shot Andy Warhol,” which is currently on location in New York with the actress Lili Taylor as the notorious shootist.

“The shooting is the central incident in my film, sure,” Harron said not long ago over drinks at Fez, a bar in downtown Manhattan. “But a lot of other things revolve around the shooting—like Valerie's desperate need for attention, her deep hurt and paranoia. She was like Andy in that they both wanted to be famous because they both wanted to be wanted.”

Fine-boned, petite, white-skinned, and blond, Harron, who will not give her age (“Let's keep it glamorously vague”), projects, alternately, a girlish affability and a mesmerizing *listening* quality. In her pre-director incarnation, Harron, a Toronto native, was a music journalist for newspapers like the *New Musical Express;* before moving on to direct for the BBC, she did research on films for British television—one of them a documentary on Warhol.

“I loved finding out about the fringe people around Warhol,” Harron recalled. “And I was particularly taken with this strange woman Valerie Solanas. I was living in London when I came across a copy of her manifesto, read it, and became obsessed with what she had to say. I wanted to know what she meant. And why it meant so much to me.”

“PEOPLE get confused when they meet Mary,” says Tom Kalin, the director of “Swoon,” who, along with the filmmaker Christine Vachon, is producing Harron's film. “Because Mary's working on this kind of material, people expect her to have hairy legs and be humorless.”

By focussing on the greatest “happening” of both Warhol's and Solanas's lives, Harron said she hopes to avoid the clichés that are generally employed to represent the sixties—the “freak-out” as standard social behavior, say, or mounds of Fabulash as a symbol of one's chic. What Harron may capture in her film is Solanas's inability to claim her independence during a period that has become synonymous with exploring the boundaries of individual freedom.

"Whatever Valerie's personal frustrations were, in the end, she couldn't cope," Harron said. "She had to find a man to pin her fear and anger on. That can be an appropriate response in life, but you have to make sense of it in art."

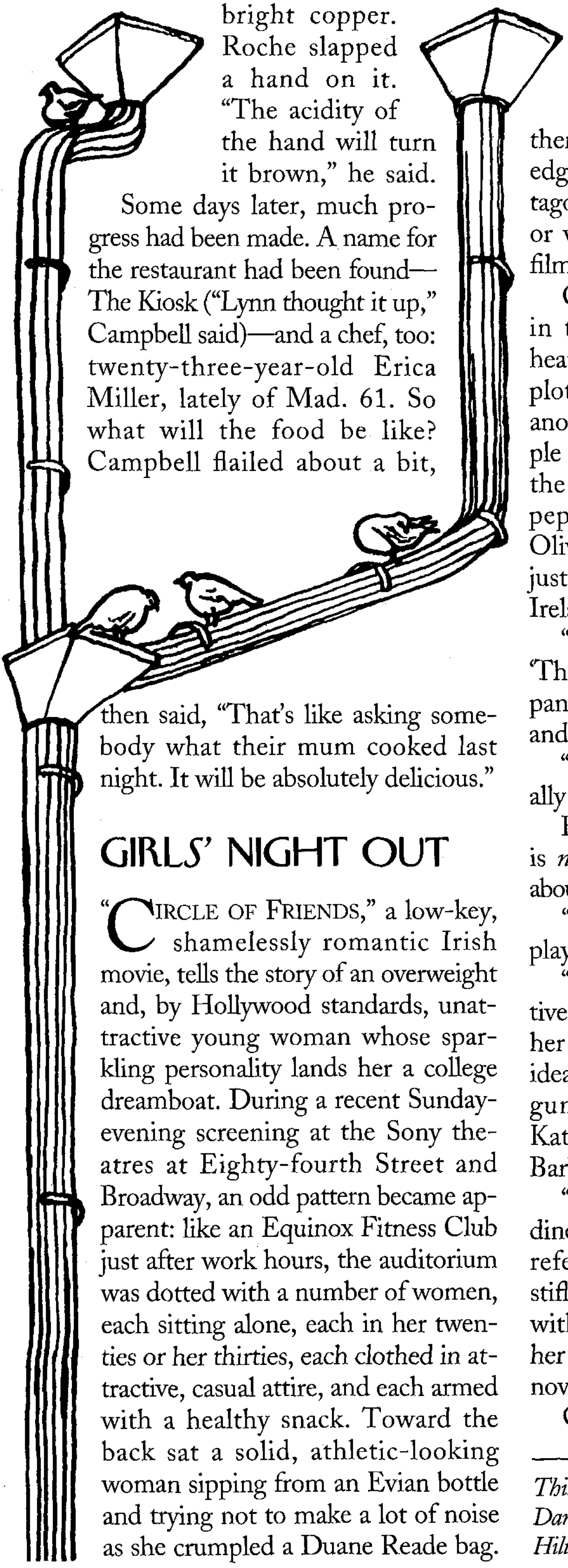
Lili Taylor said of her role, "Valerie has fascinated me ever since I read the manifesto, back in San Francisco. I was attracted to her wit and brilliance—until she became a paranoid schizophrenic." Taylor laughed. "Of course, lots of Warhol's girls could never tell where he left off and they began. This movie—it's your standard 'I love Andy Warhol' story."

NELL'S LATEST

Nell Campbell's new eatery, at Lexington Avenue and Seventy-second Street, which officially opens on June 1st, served its first lunch the other day. Actually, Campbell, a striking combination of Pre-Raphaelite lines, red hair worn in Louise Brooks bangs, and sardonic Australian humor, served it personally, unwrapping a couple of cold roast chickens from silver foil and dumping them on a small square table along with a plastic pannikin of cold tea. "She stole them from a party last night," a partner in the restaurant, Eamon Roche, said cheerfully. Absent from the table was a third partner, Lynn Wagenknecht, who was formerly married to the restaurateur Keith McNally and is involved on her own with too many modish restaurants to name comfortably in one paragraph.

Campbell herself, of course, is the actress and diva co-owner of Nell's, on Fourteenth Street—a focus of Manhattan's nocturnal energy in the post-disco years, which she describes as still "thriving." But it happens that many of Manhattan's nocturnal animals no longer seem in much of a mood for cavernous spaces. This new spot, being tiny, should suit them just fine; being unfinished, though, as is traditional just before any opening, with its wiring protruding from holes in the wall and tipped with bare light bulbs, it offered few clues to what it was going to look like. The only table in the place, the one on which the chicken was being consumed, was topped with bright copper. Roche slapped a hand on it. "The acidity of the hand will turn it brown," he said.

Some days later, much progress had been made. A name for the restaurant had been found—The Kiosk ("Lynn thought it up," Campbell said)—and a chef, too: twenty-three-year-old Erica Miller, lately of Mad. 61. So what will the food be like? Campbell flailed about a bit, then said, "That's like asking somebody what their mum cooked last night. It will be absolutely delicious."



FILIP PAGOWSKI

GIRLS' NIGHT OUT

"Circle of Friends," a low-key, shamelessly romantic Irish movie, tells the story of an overweight and, by Hollywood standards, unattractive young woman whose sparkling personality lands her a college dreamboat. During a recent Sunday-evening screening at the Sony theatres at Eighty-fourth Street and Broadway, an odd pattern became apparent: like an Equinox Fitness Club just after work hours, the auditorium was dotted with a number of women, each sitting alone, each in her twenties or her thirties, each clothed in attractive, casual attire, and each armed with a healthy snack. Toward the back sat a solid, athletic-looking woman sipping from an Evian bottle and trying not to make a lot of noise as she crumpled a Duane Reade bag. In front of her, a young woman with a tattered Penguin Classics paperback in hand glanced around furtively, dark-brown hair falling protectively around her face. A petite brunette two seats to the left sat quietly reading "Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha," the Booker Prize-winning novel by the Irish writer Roddy Doyle.

With their *Times Book Review*ed novels and—one imagines—"That Girl" apartments awaiting their return, the women seemed to pretend not to notice one another. An air of amused defensiveness hung over them, with each refusing to acknowledge that she identified with the protagonist of the film about to be shown or with any of her fellow lone female filmgoers.

Oblivious of the women, a couple in their early forties were having a heated, dangerous discussion about the plot of "The Way We Were." When another couple asked the fortyish couple what "Circle of Friends" was about, the fortyish man, who had salt-and-pepper hair and wore wire-rimmed Oliver Peoples glasses, answered, "It's just like 'The Way We Were,' but in Ireland."

"What do you mean? How is it like 'The Way We Were'?" his female companion demanded, seeming to know—and to dread—what was coming.

"You know, unattractive girl gets really handsome guy."

His companion's eyes narrowed. "That is *not* what 'The Way We Were' was about. You don't know what you're saying."

"Oh, come on. Barbra Streisand played this—"

"Barbra Streisand was *not* unattractive in that movie! That was not what her character was about. You have no idea what you're talking about." The argument continued as Hubbell and Katie's relationship was dissected and Barbra's appearance was attacked.

"Yeah, well, *he's* no Hubbell Gardiner," a lone female finally muttered, referring to Streisand's detractor. A stifled chuckle escaped from the woman with the Evian. A snicker came from her compatriot with the Roddy Doyle novel.

Camaraderie at last. ♦

This week's contributors: James Traub, Adrian Dannatt, Jesse Kornbluth, Anthony Haden-Guest, Hilton Als, Anthony Haden-Guest, Heather Byer.

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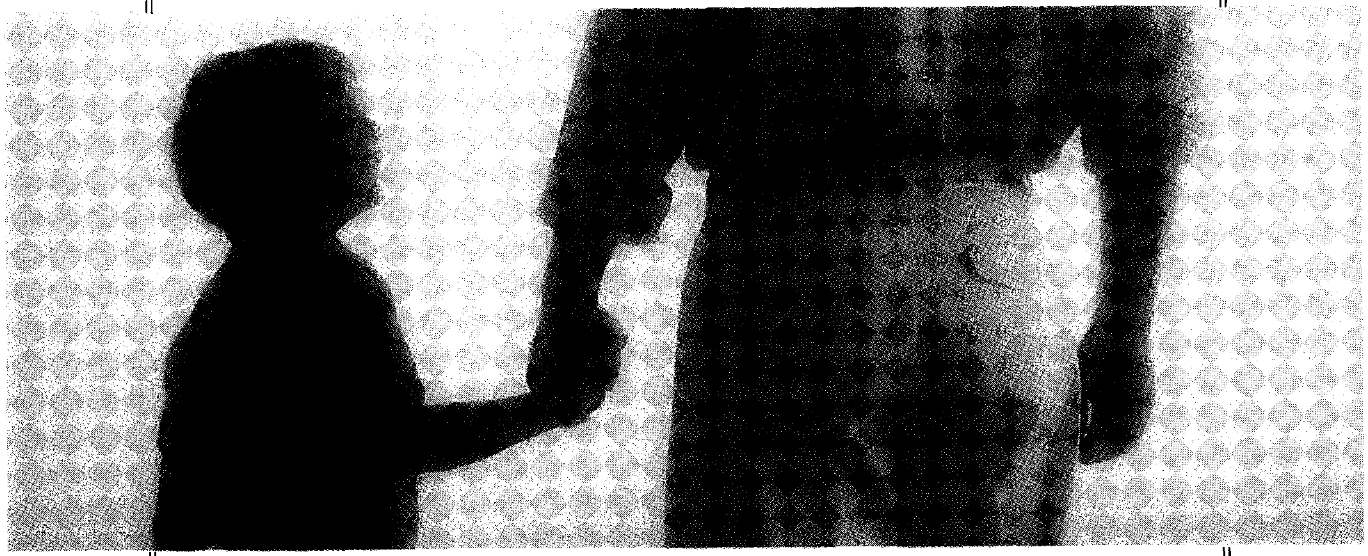

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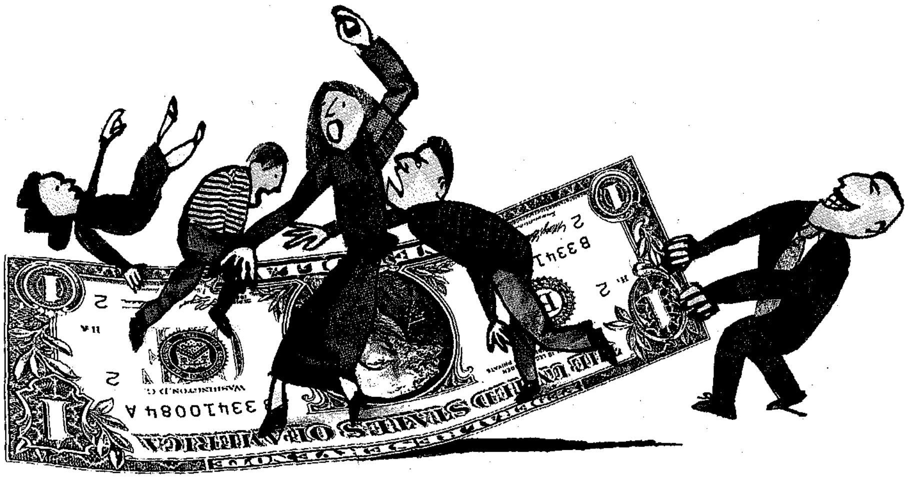
DEPT. OF DISPUTATION

THE ULTIMATE BLOCK GRANT

There is a simple way to reform welfare, but it would require Washington to abandon some preconceived notions of reforming people.

BY MICHAEL KINSLEY

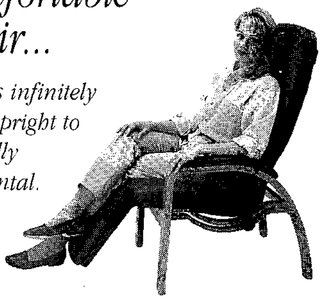


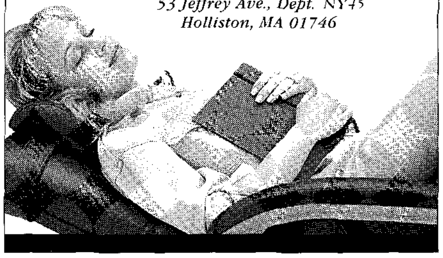
SCOTT MENCHIN

WHAT is welfare reform supposed to be about? Is it about improving the lives of poor Americans? Or is it about spending less money on them? Any mystery on this score was resolved in the welfare bill passed by the House of Representatives in March. As social policy, the bill is a shrug. It lacks even a theory of how it will solve the underclass problem, other than to offer the bland assurance that the states—liberated from the frozen embrace of the federal government—will surely find a way. Meanwhile, though, its block grants to the states do, indisputably, reduce the amount that would otherwise be spent on welfare. The Senate seems certain to pass something similar. And that will be welfare "reform."

President Clinton had a theory. His theory was that requiring welfare recipients to work would end the debilitating culture of poverty. The trouble is that in the years he has been pushing this idea he has carefully fudged the reality that a serious work requirement would cost more, not less, than the current system of cash and in-kind benefits. Right now, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (A.F.D.C.), the cash welfare program, supplies a nationwide median of forty-three hundred and eighty dollars a year to a mother with two children. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that supplying a job instead would add about three thousand dollars in administrative costs and another three thousand in day-care expenses—more than doubling the cost, even assuming you pay the mother nothing more than forty-four hundred for the work itself. Any "work requirement"—unless it is just a euphemism for cutting people off—will make welfare more expensive. The puritanical appeal of a work requirement did well for Clinton until he had to start putting numbers on it. Then the Republicans trumped him with a simple cut, gussied up as devolving power to the states.

To be sure, nobody in this debate concedes that his or her intention is to be vindictive toward the poor, or merely to save money. Everyone insists that the reforms he or she is suggesting are for welfare recipients' own good. The goal is to change their characters through "tough love." House Speaker Newt Gingrich spoke movingly, and with seeming sincerity, on the opening day of the 104th Congress. "The balanced budget is the right thing to do," he declared. "But it doesn't, in my mind, have the moral urgency of coming to grips with what's happening to the poorest Americans." Even Senator Phil Gramm, who ordinarily prides himself on having the





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courage of his nastiness, has amended his stump speech on this point. After the standard applause line about how it's time for welfare recipients to "get out of the wagon and help the rest of us pull," he now says that it's "because we love them." (This is charmingly reminiscent of the Mouseketeers' old refrain: "Why? Because we *like* you!")

It is a wonderful coincidence, to say no more, that proposals supposedly intended to benefit poor people would have the incidental effect of saving money for the rest of us. And the posture is basically unconvincing. If the Republicans could only liberate themselves from the pretense that they are trying to do poor people a favor, they might do themselves a favor, and do the poor a favor as well, by rediscovering the merits of a type of welfare reform that used to be highly regarded on the right. This is the guaranteed-income, or negative-income-tax, approach: alleviate poverty by the simple expedient of giving poor people money, with no strings attached. The payment would be based on low income and nothing more. It would gradually shrink as income rose. It could be administered as part of the income-tax system instead of as a costly welfare bureaucracy.

Think of it as the ultimate block grant. If state governments know better than the feds how to help poor people, because they are closer to the people themselves, perhaps the people themselves know even better than the states. As Milton Friedman once put it, "The advantages of this arrangement are clear. It is directed specifically at the problem of poverty. It gives help in the form most useful to the individual, namely, cash. It is general and could be substituted for the host of special measures now in effect." Furthermore, it "would eliminate the present demoralizing situation under which some people—the bureaucrats administering the programs—run other people's lives."

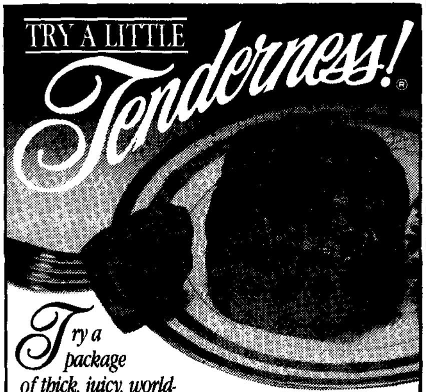
Indeed, this approach to the problem of poverty goes beyond the narrow issue of welfare reform to offer a potential moral basis for the entire conservative project of limited government. It even offers a vision of government and society that could bring together the right and the left. In short, if you are prepared to guarantee people the means to live a decent life, you are in a better position to insist that other social arrangements should be left to the private market.

Friedman is widely regarded as the godfather of the negative-income-tax idea. He proposed it in his 1962 conservative manifesto "Capitalism and Freedom." George McGovern endorsed it in 1972 as the major domestic initiative of what is widely regarded as the most left-wing major-party Presidential campaign of modern times. Liberals used to like it for conferring dignity and independence on the poor. Conservatives liked it for wiping out bureaucracies and interfering as little as possible with the free market. In 1969, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who was then President Nixon's chief adviser on urban affairs and is now New York's Democratic senator, prepared legislation to replace welfare with a guaranteed family income, and Nixon proposed it in a nationally televised address. The plan passed the House but was defeated in the Senate.

Nothing could be more out of fashion today than the idea of giving poor people money and leaving them alone. Moynihan himself—still regarded as the gold standard of welfare experts—now rejects the idea. Today, everybody is committed to social engineering.

Newt Gingrich likes to say, "I really don't want to replace the social engineering of the left with the social engineering of the right." He says this to deflect the social-issues demands of the religious right, or to justify devolution of government authority to the states (though why it's not social engineering when state governments do it is not clear). But does he mean it?

Americans, left and right, have always been ambivalent about government social engineering. Pure, principled libertarianism is popular only as a rhetorical stance. But the attitude among today's triumphant conservatives is less a matter of ambivalence than a matter of schizophrenia (and perhaps less a matter of schizophrenia than a matter of hypocrisy). On the one hand, conservatives decry "the nanny state." They denounce "big government" as an institution that can do nothing right. On the other hand, they believe that Americans have wandered too far in the pursuit of happiness. They want the government to guide its flock—and not just the poor—onto a narrower path. "The Virtuecrats," as *Newsweek's* relentless trend-spotters cleverly labelled the exponents of this



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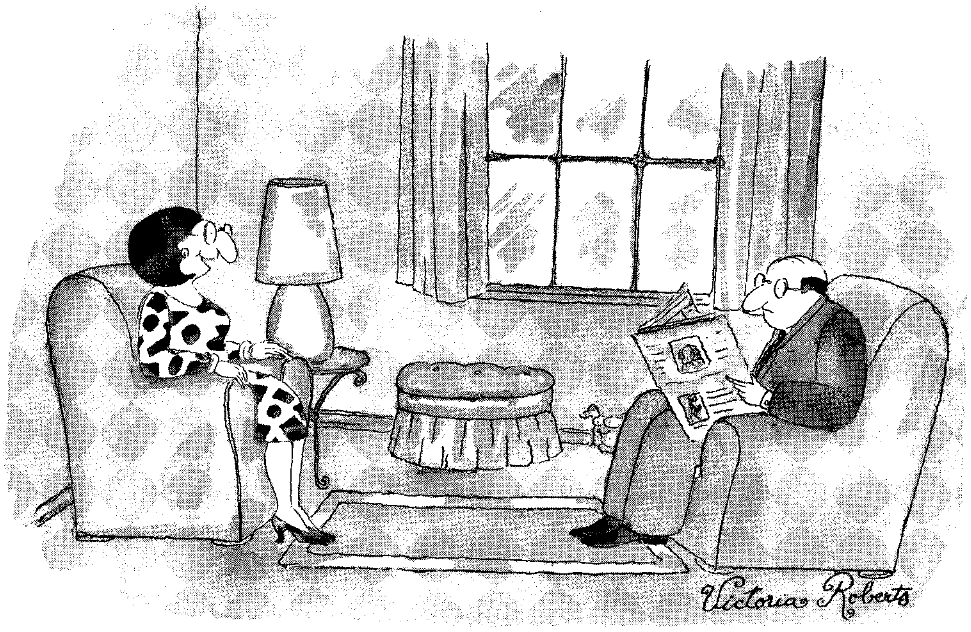


"We don't have an attic, so you'll have to keep me in the living room."

view in a cover story last year, see the "formation of good character as an urgent aim of government." Mail delivery should be privatized, but character formation should be socialized. The health of our bodies is none of the government's business, but the health of our souls should be its pressing concern.

The reductio ad absurdum of social engineering was the welfare debate's comic detour into the question of orphanages. To be sure, the detour was unplanned. Some Republicans—eager to cut off welfare benefits for various categories of "undeserving" mothers, unwilling to pay the cost of supplying them with jobs instead, but unable to explain what should happen to the children of mothers without either welfare or a job—came up with orphanages as a last resort. Having backed into it, they then defended the idea on social-engineering grounds: that kids would be raised better in orphanages than by bad parents. There are, of course, parents so bad that the state should take their children away, and arrangements for such situations already exist. The assumption underlying the recent talk of orphanages, though, was that millions of children should be taken from their mothers and raised by the state simply because the mothers didn't have enough money. Gingrich brought up Boys Town as a model. But the notion of taking children away from their parents and raising them communally—in an atmosphere scientifically designed to implant, from Day One, officially sanctioned values—derives more from the radical socialism of the Israeli kibbutz than from anything in the American tradition. And even in the kibbutzim the practice has been largely abandoned. What killed off the orphanage boomlet, however, was not opposition to the principle of social engineering but, rather, a growing realization of the price tag: at least thirty thousand dollars a year per child.

Congressional Republicans, in their Contract with America, gave their proposed welfare reform the Orwellian title "The Personal Responsibility Act." "Personal responsibility" is a great mantra of all politicians of both parties at the moment. But few really believe in personal responsibility. Social engineering and personal responsibility are inconsistent. The real meaning of personal responsibility is that you should be free to live your own life and take the consequences. Even if it is better not to use drugs or be unemployed or have children out of wedlock, for example, the misery you bring on yourself is not society's responsibility. You make your own bed and then you lie in it.

One reason we have welfare at all is a recognition that people's destinies are not totally within their control. Bad luck does exist. But genuine personal responsibility was thought—especially by conservatives—to be one of the advantages of the guaranteed-income approach to welfare reform: give people enough money to get by on, then get out of their way and don't worry excessively about what they do with it. That's their problem. Two decades ago, Moynihan (who worked for Nixon, remember), in his book "The Politics of a Guaranteed Income," said, "It would also restore . . . some sense of individual responsibility for outcomes."

To be sure, the basic libertarian argument—that people have the right to live as they want, provided they don't interfere with others' right to do the same—is complicated when the people in question are living on government money. People don't necesssarily have the right to live as they want to on other people's nickel. But the full libertarian argument is not just one of rights. It is that society shouldn't even desire to constrain individual behavior, except to the extent that it impinges on others. Indeed, "society" shouldn't even pretend to know the best way to pursue individual happiness. This larger libertarian principle has nothing to do with how that pursuit is financed.

Of course, some underclass behavior does impinge on others. Bad parenting (and reckless conception) harms children. Crime harms its victims. There is irony in hearing conservatives carry on about the "root causes" of crime in a way they used to mock liberals for—and still do on other occasions. Nevertheless, if we knew for sure that social-engineering-style welfare reform would stop these things it would be worth doing. But the passion behind draconian welfare reform exceeds any rational assessment of what it is likely to achieve.

In a way, the guaranteed-income approach to the underclass problem is like Senator George Aiken's solution to the Vietnam War: declare victory and come home. Its aim is not to remake the poor in any respect except their poverty. For that reason, it is vulnerable to attack for callous indifference—by those whose self-styled tough-love approaches are alleged to be motivated by a higher desire to reform the character of poor people. In a brilliant public-relations inversion, cutting people off welfare has been repackaged as the compassionate approach.

Fittingly, you might think, for this age of skepticism about the possibilities of government—when the certitudinous likes of Pat Moynihan and James Q.

Wilson throw up their hands in despairing uncertainty about what might solve the underclass puzzle—the guaranteed-income approach is narrow in its aspirations. It addresses the one aspect of the so-called "culture of poverty" that we know for certain how to cure, which is poverty itself. And this is no small thing, even though it violates today's conservative political correctness to note that poverty is to some degree a lack of money. Or, as Moynihan noted in his book, "the one seemingly fixed correlation in social statistics is that well-being rises with income."

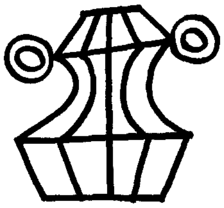
The principled appeal of a negative-income-tax approach is that it aims for Newt Gingrich's alleged goal: it truly does not aspire to social engineering of either the right or the left. Nevertheless, its behavioral effects might well be an improvement on those of the current system.

The two great behavioral vices attributed to welfare are a disincentive to work and an incentive to have babies out of wedlock. Consider, first, work. One oddity of the widespread belief, especially among conservatives, that welfare makes people lazy is the way it conflicts with the cardinal principle of supply-side economics: that economic decisions are made at the margin. The conservative obsession with marginal tax rates in the top brackets is based on the belief that a person's work effort will be determined by how much of the next dollar he or she is allowed to keep, irrespective of how many dollars he or she may already have. Yet in the case of welfare the conservative view is that the money itself—not the rate at which it is taken away—is what saps individual initiative. Start a person with ten million dollars and he will worry exclusively about how hard it is to earn the next dollar, but start a person with ten thousand dollars and she will stop working, regardless of how easy or hard the next dollar is to come by. That is the theory.

A more reasonable assumption is that poor people are not immune to the incentives that affect rich people. But because poor people lose their benefits as their incomes go up they face extremely high effective marginal tax rates—estimated by Gary Burtless, of the Brookings Institution, at between eighty and a hundred per cent. A big advantage of the negative income tax is that it reduces this effective marginal tax rate on welfare recipients. It does this by phasing out benefits more slowly as income rises.

True, there is another way to reduce the marginal tax rate on welfare beneficiaries. That would be to eliminate welfare completely—as some conservatives, among them Charles Murray and William Bennett, have been bold enough to suggest. If there were no welfare, welfare recipients would not lose benefits as their incomes rose; the marginal tax rate would be zero. And there would undoubtedly be a strong incentive to work. There would also be a strong incentive to starve. You have to be awfully confident of your own righteousness to maintain seriously that a complete welfare cutoff would actually be a favor to the poor.

Many citizens who object to the current welfare system make no pretense that their main concern is for the poor. They simply object, understandably if not admirably, to sharing their own hard-earned dollars with someone who isn't working. These people will be harder to persuade that the solution to the welfare mess is to give their money to poor folks with even fewer strings attached. Yet there are only two logical alternatives: simply cutting welfare and damn the consequences, or requiring welfare recipients to work. A simple cutoff is more heartless than most people are prepared to be. But a work requirement would be more expensive, not less so. Would taxpayers who complain about welfare bums be happy to pay more for welfare, provided that those bums were put to work? Work-requirement enthusiasts like President Clinton thought so. Apparently, they were wrong.



The connection between welfare and illegitimacy—the other big behavioral issue—is far from clear. Out-of-wedlock births have been rising throughout society, faster among whites than among blacks, though from a higher base among blacks and the poor. Illegitimacy rates among welfare recipients rose when welfare payments were rising, and have continued to rise in recent years when the real value of welfare payments has been falling. There seems to be no correlation between welfare-benefit levels and illegitimacy rates.

And from both the right and the left there are plausible alternative theories about the increase in illegitimacy. Just three years ago, the conservative party line was that irresponsible behavior in the ghettos is caused by a larger culture of license spread by liberals in places of influence like Hollywood. In Dan Quayle's famous "Murphy Brown" speech, he declared, "The intergenerational poverty that troubles us so much today is predominantly a poverty of values." On the other hand, there is the well-known thesis of the University of Chicago sociologist William Julius Wilson that changes in the larger economy have removed good jobs from the inner cities and thereby depleted the population of marriageable men.

Nevertheless, welfare surely does make it easier for single women to have children they cannot support. A negative-income-tax approach would eliminate some current rules that actually discourage the formation of two-parent families. Everyone would qualify, including men, on the basis of the single factor of low income. For that reason, the program would encourage marriage and discourage illegitimacy. But, simply by making it more affordable to stay single and have babies (or to divorce), a guaranteed-income program would have the opposite effect as well. Burtless, of Brookings, a former negative-income-tax enthusiast, has, like Moynihan, jumped off the train, in part over this point. Yet no one can say how all these factors would balance out. And here is where one's opposition to social engineering is put to the test. Since the effects of various welfare arrangements on people's life choices is so uncertain, why not be as neutral as possible and let people pursue happiness as they think best?

Two elements of our current welfare system already resemble a negative income tax. The food-stamp program distributes near-cash on the basis of need, with few strings attached. The earned-income tax credit, a tax-code benefit for low-income workers, is paid in cash to those with incomes too low to owe any taxes. The idea would be to merge these and other welfare benefits into the income-tax system.

A properly functioning guaranteed-income program is not easy to design. The two main elements are the minimum guarantee (how much you get if you have no other income) and the phase-out rate (how much you lose for every dollar of income you earn). The phase-out rate should be as low as possible, since it operates like a tax in discouraging work effort. The trouble is that phasing out benefits at a slower rate means giving benefits to higher-income people, which gets expensive. For example, a pie-in-the-sky guaranteed-income program might aspire to bring everybody up to the poverty line. Currently, that is about eleven thousand five hundred dollars for a family of three. It is not hard to find the money to do this. Indeed, we are already spending it. Estimates of the real cost of welfare for the average family of three range up to fifteen thousand dollars a year. That includes A.F.D.C., food stamps, Medicaid, housing subsidies, and miscellaneous other help. It also includes the cost of the bureaucracies that administer these various programs.

The problem is the phase-out. If you aim for a phase-out rate of, say, thirty cents for every dollar of income, people would still be collecting benefits up to incomes of more than thirty-eight thousand dollars, which is just about the national median family income. If you decide that you want to stop paying benefits at, say, twenty thousand dollars, which is about the level at which a family of three or four starts paying income taxes now, a thirty-per-cent phase-out rate would mean that the basic guarantee would be just six thousand dollars. You can play with these numbers. But if you raise the phase-out rate or lower the basic guarantee you start to destroy the chief advantages of the guaranteed-income idea.

The math is daunting—but not impossible. This is especially true if you think of a guaranteed income along with the tax cut for middle-income families which both parties are now pushing, or with the tax-simplification proposals of several leading Republicans. It might even be the salvation of House Majority Leader Dick Armey's so-called flat-tax plan. A pure negative income tax would be fully merged into the regular income-tax system, and would thereby (in Milton and Rose Friedman's words) "help to eliminate the present division of the population into two classes—those who pay and those who are supported on public funds." George McGovern's original 1972 plan would have replaced both the welfare system and the per-person exemptions of the income-tax code with a thousand-dollar tax credit for every citizen—"refundable" in cash to those with incomes too low to use up the credit. That's about thirty-two hundred dollars in today's money, or almost ten thousand dollars for a family of three. Something like this would be very expensive. It would amount to redistribution on a grand scale. But the main beneficiaries of such redistribution would not be the non-working poor, who already get welfare benefits worth at least that much. Most of the redistribution would benefit the struggling lower middle class—those in the phase-out range. Furthermore, much of the redistribution would take the form of a tax cut; that is, "letting people keep more of their own money," as conservative propagandists like to put it.

Here is where the negative-income-tax idea starts to be not just an option for welfare reform but an appealing way to look at the general question of the role of government. It is a way for left and right to call each other's bluff. Once society has provided all its members the means to live a minimally decent life, we could justifiably reconsider much else that the government currently does. For example, the federal and state governments spend more than twenty-three billion dollars a year on various housing programs (not including the biggest of all, the home-mortgage-interest deduction). These housing programs deliver their benefits virtually at random; some families above the poverty line get subsidies worth thousands, while many of the very poor get nothing. The more such programs you put in the pot, the more generous the guaranteed income can be.

But the concept should not be limited to welfare narrowly defined. There are programs, such as farm price supports, that are basically about providing income security to specific groups. Other policies, such as the minimum-wage law and the Davis-Bacon Act, which mandates union-level wages on federal construction projects, are based on the premise that every working American should be able to afford a recognizably American life style. If that goal can be fulfilled through a guaranteed-income program, we can avoid the argument about whether or not the minimum wage destroys jobs.

Even affirmative action is essentially a redistributionist policy, of a peculiar type. As I argued in these pages several weeks ago, affirmative action redistributes inequality—by moving people up and down in established hierarchies—instead of reducing it. A guaranteed-income scheme, by contrast, attacks inequality directly, and in a race-neutral way—although in practice blacks would benefit disproportionately. Conservative critics of affirmative action have made fantastic claims about the billions of dollars it costs the economy every year. Why not end affirmative action and put some of those billions in the pot for a guaranteed minimum income?

Other government activities that conservatives often object to are not redistributionist in intent. Nevertheless, a guaranteed-income scheme would cast a new light on them. Programs like Amtrak and the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities allocate society's resources in ways that private markets would choose not to. Critics ask why the government should have more say than consumers, voting with their "dollar ballots," on how their money should be spent. The argument would be more persuasive if everyone had a certain minimum number of dollar ballots to vote with.

The general point is this: Unfettered free-market capitalism is, in most circumstances, the best guarantor of both economic prosperity and personal freedom. But unfettered capitalism generates losers and winners in ways that can't always be attributed to effort or merit. Solution? Let capitalism work its will, but establish a floor below which people will not be allowed to sink. The more government programs you throw into the pot, the higher that floor can be. The more you make the free market the test of all things, the higher that floor *ought* to be. Privatize and deregulate to your hearts' content, old boys. But if the game of life is to become more competitive the initial distribution of chips becomes more important.

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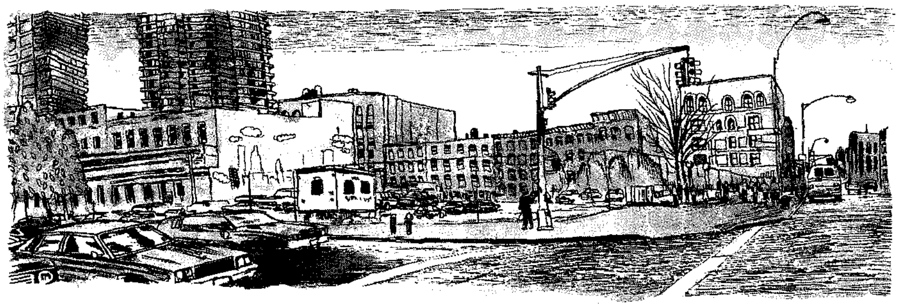
OUR LOCAL CORRESPONDENTS

THE POLITICAL SUPERMARKET

When a grocery chain offered to open a store in an area of Harlem that was devoid of major businesses, the politicians decided to go shopping.

BY JAMES TRAUB



GARY PANTER

IT'S a rare day when anything good comes to East Harlem, one of the most impoverished neighborhoods in New York City. One good thing that has happened in recent years was the decision by the Pathmark grocery chain, which has made a business out of operating stores in the inner city, to put a giant store at 125th Street and Lexington Avenue, a corner that now consists of a parking lot, a dentist's office, another parking lot, and a shuttered bar. The people of East Harlem were pleased. The proposed store not only would allow them to shop for fresh, inexpensive groceries nearby—rather than taking a bus or a car to a Pathmark in the Bronx or Westchester, as many now do—but also would bring two hundred construction jobs and two hundred permanent jobs to the neighborhood. The city designated a local nonprofit group to develop the project, at a cost of twelve million dollars, and the developer, in turn, found the financing to make it happen. New York City seemed to be behaving, just this once, like a rational town rather than a dysfunctional family. And then the cauldron in which the city's racial and ethnic and political rivalries are forever simmering boiled over and the Pathmark project was converted from a straightforward commercial transaction to a battle cry. It was one of those spectacles which would be absurd if they weren't so dreadful.

The saga started in the late sixties, when community activists began trying to develop the city-owned plot on 125th between Lex and Third. Finally, in 1989, Pathmark agreed to open a store at the site in conjunction with the Community Association of East Harlem Triangle, a nonprofit organization that builds housing in the area, and a group of private investors; this local team then won development rights to the plot in the city's competitive-bidding process. The investors failed to scare up enough investment, however, and in 1993 the city removed them in favor of the Abyssinian Development Corporation, which is the nonprofit development wing of the Abyssinian Baptist Church, one of the oldest and most notable churches in Harlem.

At the time, J. P. Morgan, Prudential Insurance, and others had just formed a national investment pool called The Retail Initiative, with the express purpose of financing supermarkets in low-income areas—areas of the sort that are normally redlined by commercial banks. The Pathmark project was just the kind of public-private venture that T.R.I. had been looking for, and the fund agreed to invest a million five hundred thousand dollars in the venture. The developers also received grants of seven hundred thousand dollars from the federal government and four hundred thousand from the state—both from funds designed to promote investment in impoverished areas. Now the developers had enough equity to take out a construction loan of eight million dollars from Chemical Bank and build a store of fifty-three thousand square feet, or about the size of a football field, which Pathmark had agreed to lease for twenty-five years.

The one group that took exception to the project was the owners of sixteen midsized grocery stores in the neighborhood, who felt the way hardware stores on Main Street feel when they hear that Wal-Mart or Home Depot is moving in—as if they were about to be swamped. At first, the store owners wrote to city officials and politicians complaining that the subsidies granted to the project were unfair and that the new store would destroy indigenous business. They didn't get much of a hearing. In fact, a study commissioned by the city found that so many food dollars were now leaving East Harlem that the Pathmark would in all likelihood bring shoppers back to the neighborhood; it would not unduly threaten "the viability of any reasonably well run establishment." Another study found that a Pathmark that opened on the Lower East Side in 1984 had had no net effect on the number of nearby grocery stores. The analogy with Wal-Mart was simply wrong.

On a personal level, however, it's not hard to understand the grocers' sense of injury. One morning, I went up to 116th Street, the main boulevard of the barrio, to talk to Alfredo Rodriguez, who was one of the leaders of the crusade against Pathmark. Rodriguez told me that his family emigrated from the Dominican Republic when he was five, and that he began working in bodegas when he was thirteen. He was part of a new wave of Dominican immigrants, who had begun to buy bodegas from Puerto Rican owners in the nineteen-seventies, and, as grocery chains left the inner-city neighborhoods, had moved up to take over these much larger establishments. Six years ago, Rodriguez took over an abandoned Red Apple on 116th Street; last year, he bought another one, on 120th Street. Rodriguez says that he has poured more than a million dollars into the ventures. The 116th Street store is neat, well lit, and well stocked. Rodriguez is immensely proud of his achievements. He played by the rules of the marketplace and now, to his mind, he's being asked to compete against a multibillion-dollar company whose way has been greased by grants and cheap loans.

The grocers represent the immigrant energies that have given new life to many of New York's most depressed neighborhoods. Their lobbyist, Richard Lipsky, says, "If anyone is going to get a subsidy, it should be to reward people who took the risks in the neighborhood." Actually, Rodriguez, owing to the size of his investment, *is* eligible for a tax abatement similar to the one that Pathmark is receiving, but he seemed unaware of this when I mentioned it to him. What is more important, most of the subsidy is going to the nonprofit developers, and not to Pathmark, which has agreed to pay well over market rent and will thus have higher costs than its competitors. The Pathmark project is an example neither of the marvels of the free market nor of the evils of corporate welfare but of the sort of public-private alliance required to bring investment to depressed areas.

"Oh, please go on. I can listen and shred at the same time."

THE grocers, having been bested, as they felt, by politics, began to assemble a political team. One of the first to sign on was Adam Clayton Powell IV, the local City Council member and the son of one of the most flamboyant figures in modern black political history. One might think that Powell would champion a project so ardently welcomed by the average Harlemite. But in fact he was persuaded, he says, that the giant store would "destroy the local economy," though he concedes that it would create almost as many jobs as it could conceivably eliminate should every local grocery go out of business. He may also have had reasons of his own for opposing the project. Powell, whose mother is Puerto Rican, has long courted the Latino vote. And he has a running feud with Harlem's congressman, Charles Rangel, who ended the elder Powell's reign in a bitterly contested 1970 congressional election. The younger Powell ran against Rangel in a 1994 primary and lost badly. In a special three-way election for a vacant State Assembly seat earlier this year, Rangel backed a pro-Pathmark candidate and Powell backed an anti-; Rangel's man beat the two other candidates. Rangel is close to the Reverend Calvin Butts, the pastor of the Abyssinian Baptist Church and one of the moving forces behind the Pathmark project. Rangel *is* the establishment in Harlem, and the establishment supported Pathmark. And so the project became one of the proxy issues through which Powell did battle with his nemesis.

Powell and his supporters at first tried to derail the Pathmark project in the local community board—Board 11. It had voted for the project back in 1989, and its economic-development committee had continued to support it thereafter. The board's leadership was solidly in the Rangel camp; Pathmark became enmeshed in Powell's struggle for dominance over the board. According to the board chairman, Eddie Baca, Powell began spreading word that Baca was in the pay of Pathmark. I asked Powell about that grave allegation. "I have no proof of it, but I know that he is," he said. "All of us believe that." Baca, who refers to Powell as "that idiot," told me, "I would sooner cut my hands off than take money from anyone." Powell failed to get the board to change its vote.

The project did have a political, rather than an economic, weak spot: while the leading figures in both East Harlem Triangle and Abyssinian Development are black, East Harlem itself—Spanish Harlem, El Barrio—is, though racially mixed, traditionally the heart of Latino culture in New York City. Social-service projects intended for East Harlem are usually steered to Latino groups, while anything undertaken in Central Harlem goes to black-run groups. The officials who put together the transaction were acutely aware of the issue of ethnic turf, and tried hard to find a Latino partner for East Harlem Triangle, but none of the possible candidates, one official says, were as professional or as stable as Abyssinian Development. In the community board and elsewhere, opponents of the project began to raise this supposed insult to Latino pride. Two different officials involved with the Pathmark project say that Richard Lipsky told them he was consciously appealing to ethnic rivalry, but Lipsky denies that this is the case.

Ethnic chauvinism and ethnic politics finally did the trick. All nine members of the Puerto Rican-Hispanic Caucus in the City Council agreed to oppose the project. One of the most surprising recruits was Antonio Pagán, an openly gay representative from the Lower East Side, who in years past hadn't hesitated to defy gay organizations, or the social-service groups that had long held power in his district. Pagán had been praised in the pages of the conservative *City Journal*. But he may have had political calculations of his own. He was widely believed to have designs on the job of Ruth Messinger, the Manhattan Borough President, who was a critical supporter of Pathmark and a figure for whom he seemed to have a special loathing. It was Pagán more than anyone else who upped the racial ante. In mid-April, he told the *Times* columnist Joyce Purnick, "They didn't propose this for black Harlem. They proposed this for Spanish Harlem. It's amazing. Shame on them." This and similar comments provoked a counterreaction from some black figures, including an editorial in the Brooklyn weekly *City Sun* that declared, "Dominicans are notorious for their exploitation of Blacks."

When I went to visit Pagán, a short, excitable man with a thin border of beard, I found him rife with conspiracy theories. The whole deal, he said, had been wired by Representative Rangel (whose name he Hispanicized, as "Ran-*hel*"), Ruth Messinger, and C. Virginia Fields, a City Council member from Harlem. He reiterated that "outsiders" should not be developing East Harlem. And, while he disapproved of "knee-jerk racial politics," he found it strange that "from a purely academic point of view, it's O.K. for black leaders and activists to portray black rage." He went on, "Somehow when Latino elected officials and leaders stand up to defend their community, they're immediately racist." Latino politics in New York has been, by and large, free from the tub-thumping and racial incitements of an Al Sharpton or an Alton Maddox; Pagán seemed to be tacking toward that maelstrom.

Most Hispanic leaders in New York have a more ecumenical vision than Pagán; many of them—perhaps the great majority—support the Pathmark deal. Board 11, for example, has more Latinos than blacks. But the opponents managed to raise their voices high enough to drown out the others. On March 21st, the Hispanic members of the City Council sent a letter to Mayor

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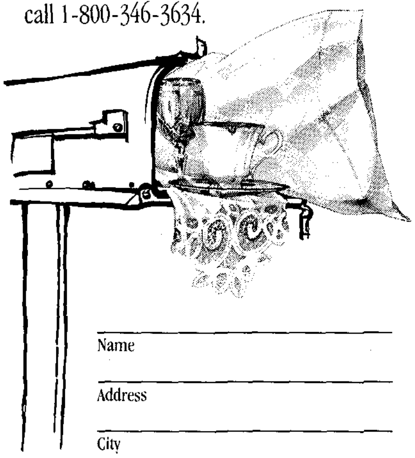

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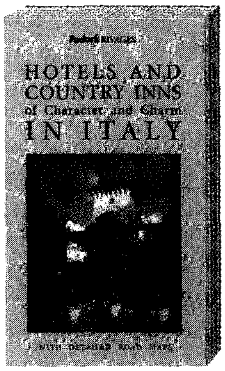

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Giuliani repeating the claim that Pathmark would wipe out the competition, and stating, "Your attempt to destroy these businesses is an abomination that will remain an infamous stain on any administration legacy in the Puerto Rican-Hispanic community." This was a naked political threat, and the Mayor apparently heard it. A recent poll had shown a shocking drop, from forty-two per cent to nineteen, in the number of Latinos who approved of the Mayor's performance. Estimates suggest that the Mayor had received more than a third of the Latino vote but only five per cent of the black vote. For months, City Hall officials had been touting the Pathmark project, which seemed to herald precisely the rebound in private investment that the Mayor had felt his policies would produce; suddenly, a few days before the Borough Board was scheduled to vote, the Mayor took a studiously neutral stand, and even questioned the project's "absentee ownership." And so Giuliani, for all his famous insistence on the principled stand, may have made a political decision of his own. Apparently, he had been persuaded that Hispanics generally, and not just these nine officeholders, were infuriated by the Pathmark project—a great victory for Antonio Pagán's politics of Latino rage.

NOW the fate of the Pathmark project, six years in the making, was up in the air. The Borough Board, which in this case consisted of the ten City Council members from Manhattan, Ruth Messinger, and Eddie Baca, seemed to be equally divided. The two Republican members, Charles Millard and Andrew Eristoff, opposed the project. They both say that they considered the subsidies granted to the developer a violation of free-market principles—a position of remarkable ideological purity, given the actual stakes of the vote for the people of East Harlem. The inveterate liberals on the Council (with the exception of the Latinos) were voting for private-sector investment; the conservatives were voting against it.

A day or two before the vote, one of the Council members opposing Pathmark, Guillermo Linares, began to suffer an attack of doubt. Linares had more at stake than any of his colleagues. He was the first Dominican ever elected to the City Council, and he represented the heavily Dominican neighborhood of Washington Heights. His constituents were likely to feel far more passionate about the interests of the small businessmen than about a supermarket miles away. And weighing just as heavily on his conscience, he says, was the fact that Alfredo Rodriguez was one of his closest friends. A few months earlier, Rodriguez had flown to the Dominican Republic for the day to attend the funeral of Linares's mother. Now Linares realized that his vote could doom the Pathmark project. "I began seriously thinking about the implications for the community of killing the project," says Linares, a slender man with thinning hair, a drooping gray mustache, and a gloomy cast to his face—or perhaps that is of recent vintage. "Financial institutions in the city and others who might take a step to help the community—what kind of message are we giving them? And, by the way, I became very concerned and aware of the fact that race was being made a part of the thing." Linares wondered what would happen to Dominican store owners in black neighborhoods. He remembered the violent passions stirred by the black boycott of two Korean grocery stores in Brooklyn in 1990. The night before the vote, Linares lay awake in an agony of indecision.

Linares talked to Rodriguez twice that night. Linares says that he was expressing his concerns. Rodriguez, who has a wholly different recollection of these final hours, says that Linares reaffirmed his opposition to the project. The next morning, Linares, Rodriguez, Pagán, and Powell rode up in the elevator together on their way to the Borough President's office, in the Municipal Building, without discussing the project—or so Linares remembers it. While the others waited for the vote to be called, Linares found a room in the warren of offices where he could sit and think. He finally called Rodriguez—or perhaps Rodriguez called him—and said that he could not bring himself to kill the project. Linares went outside and voted for the project, and the room erupted with cheers and with shouts of outrage. The project passed by a vote of 7–5. (A tie would have meant defeat.)

Antonio Pagán, whose political calculations and prospects Linares's vote may have seriously compromised, now accuses his colleague of "betrayal," and loudly asks, "What's the price?" Alfredo Rodriguez has a sign in his office reading, "*Linares es el Traidor de los Dominicanos,*" though he cannot bring himself to utter the harsh epithet. Instead, he says, with genuine bafflement, "I think that there was tremendous political pressure." Linares, who has made enemies of people he needs and respects and made admirers of people he can live without, sat in his dingy City Council office recently next to a computer whose screen said, "Abort, Retry, Ignore, Fail." It was getting on toward evening, and the other offices were mainly empty. Linares was still wearing his suit jacket; his tie was knotted. "What pained me the most was knowing that I had worked with Al and that probably I would lose him as a friend," he said softly. That pained him more than the thought that he might have destroyed his political future. He added, "I know that I made the right decision. I will live with it for the rest of my life as the appropriate thing to do."

Now the city's Economic Development Corporation, which must vote on the plan, is waiting for instructions from the Mayor, who once said that he would abide by the will of the board. He still may decide otherwise, but it seems likely, thanks to Linares, that the people of East Harlem will have a big, modern supermarket, and the jobs and the burst of fresh energy that go with it. Meanwhile, up in the South Bronx, Pathmark is thinking about working with a local nonprofit to operate another store. The nonprofit is black, the neighborhood is mixed, the owners of the nearby stores are mainly Hispanic. The *Daily News* recently ran an article featuring a photograph of Richard Lipsky posing with a group of local grocers in the vacant lot slated for the Bronx project. I asked Lipsky if the city should expect more of the same. He didn't flinch. "We don't want to see these local groups work against their own business class," he said. ◆

THIS MONTH'S HOSPITALITY TIP

[*From Vanity Fair*]

Behind the impenetrable windows of the prison waiting area, where death-row inmates in the state of Texas entertain all visitors until they are executed by lethal injection, Donald Aldrich tries to explain some of the psychology that went into the killing of Nicholas West that November night in 1993.

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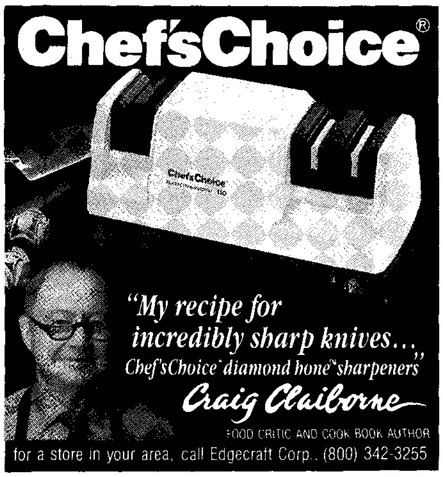
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CITY PERILS

THE FIFTY-NINE-STORY CRISIS

What's an engineer's worst nightmare? To realize that the supports he designed for a skyscraper like Citicorp Center are flawed—and hurricane season is approaching.

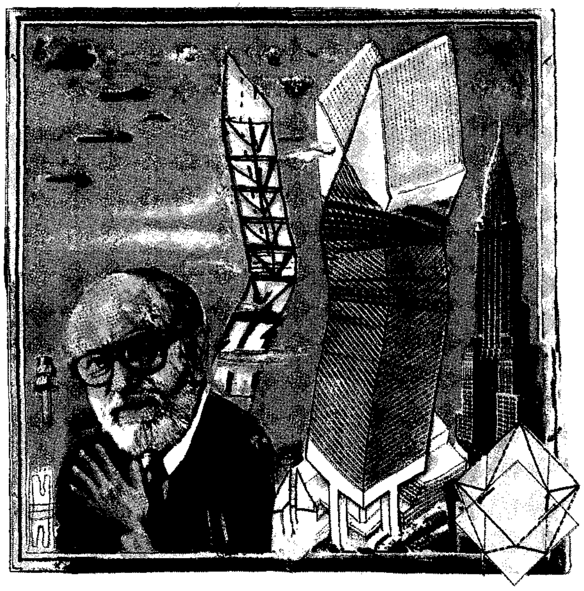
BY JOE MORGENSTERN

On a warm June day in 1978, William J. LeMessurier, one of the nation's leading structural engineers, received a phone call at his headquarters, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, from an engineering student in New Jersey. The young man, whose name has been lost in the swirl of subsequent events, said that his professor had assigned him to write a paper on the Citicorp tower, the slash-topped silver skyscraper that had become, on its completion in Manhattan the year before, the seventh-tallest building in the world.

LeMessurier found the subject hard to resist, even though the call caught him in the middle of a meeting. As a structural consultant to the architect Hugh Stubbins, Jr., he had designed the twenty-five-thousand-ton steel skeleton beneath the tower's sleek aluminum skin. And, in a field where architects usually get all the credit, the engineer, then fifty-two, had won his own share of praise for the tower's technical elegance and singular grace; indeed, earlier that year he had been elected to the National Academy of Engineering, the highest honor his profession bestows. Excusing himself from the meeting, LeMessurier asked his caller how he could help.

The student wondered about the columns—there are four—that held the building up. According to his professor, LeMessurier had put them in the wrong place.

"I was very nice to this young man," LeMessurier recalls. "But I said, 'Listen, I want you to tell your teacher that he doesn't know what the hell he's talking about, because he doesn't know the problem that had to be solved.' I promised to call back after my meeting and explain the whole thing."


To avert disaster, LeMessurier knew that he would have to blow the whistle quickly—on himself.

GARY POWELL

The problem had been posed by a church. When planning for Citicorp Center began, in the early nineteen-seventies, the site of choice was on the east side of Lexington Avenue between Fifty-third and Fifty-fourth Streets, directly across the street from Citicorp's headquarters. But the northwest corner of that block was occupied by St. Peter's Church, a decaying Gothic structure built in 1905. Since St. Peter's owned the corner, and one of the world's biggest banking corporations wanted the whole block, the church was able to strike a deal that seemed heaven-sent: its old building would be demolished and a new one built as a freestanding part of Citicorp Center.

To clear space for the new church, Hugh Stubbins and Bill LeMessurier (he pronounces his name "LeMeasure") set their fifty-nine-story tower on four massive, nine-story-high stilts, and positioned them at the center of each side, rather than at each corner. This daring scheme allowed the designers to cantilever the building's corners seventy-two feet out over the church, on the northwest, and over a plaza on the southwest. The columns also produced high visual drama: a nine-hundred-and-fourteen-foot monolith that seemed all but weightless as it hovered above the street.

When LeMessurier called the student back, he related this with the pride of a master builder and the elaborate patience of a pedagogue; he, too, taught a structural-engineering class, to architecture students at Harvard. Then he explained how the peculiar geometry of the building, far from constituting a mistake, put the columns in the strongest position to resist what sailors call quartering winds—those which come from a diagonal and, by flowing across two sides of a building at once, increase the forces on both. For further enlightenment on the matter, he referred the student to a technical article written by LeMessurier's partner in New York, an engineer named Stanley Goldstein. LeMessurier recalls, "I gave him a lot of information, and I said, 'Now you really have something on your professor, because you can explain all of this to him yourself.' "

Later that day, LeMessurier decided that the information would interest his own students; like sailors, designers of tall buildings must know the wind and respect its power. And the columns were only part of the tower's defense against swaying in severe winds. A classroom lecture would also look at the tower's unusual system of wind braces, which LeMessurier had first sketched out, in a burst of almost ecstatic invention, on a napkin in a Greek restaurant in Cambridge: forty-eight braces, in six tiers of eight, arrayed like giant chevrons behind the building's curtain of aluminum and glass. ("I'm very vain," LeMessurier says. "I would have liked my stuff to be expressed on the outside of the building, but Stubbins wouldn't have it. In the end, I told myself I didn't give a damn—the structure was there, it'd be seen by God.")

LeMessurier had long since established the strength of those braces in perpendicular winds—the only calculation required by New York City's building code. Now, in the spirit of intellectual play, he wanted to see if they were just as strong in winds hitting from forty-five degrees. His new calculations surprised him. In four of the eight chevrons in each tier, a quartering wind increased the strain by forty per cent. Under normal circumstances, the wind braces would have absorbed the extra load without so much as a tremor. But the circumstances were not normal. A few weeks before, during a meeting in his office, LeMessurier had learned of a crucial change in the way the braces were joined.

THE meeting had been called, during the month of May, to review plans for two new skyscrapers in Pittsburgh. Those towers, too, were designed by Hugh Stubbins with LeMessurier as structural consultant, and the plans called for wind braces similar to those used in Citicorp Center, with the same specifications for welded joints. This was top-of-the-line engineering; two structural members joined by a skilled welder become as strong as one. But welded joints, which are labor-intensive and therefore expensive, can be needlessly strong; in most cases, bolted joints are more practical and equally safe. That was the position taken at the May meeting by a man from U.S. Steel, a potential bidder on the contract to erect the Pittsburgh towers. If welded joints were a condition, the project might be too expensive and his firm might not want to take it on.

To reassure him, LeMessurier put in a call to his office in New York. "I spoke to Stanley Goldstein and said, 'Tell me about your success with those welded joints in Citicorp.' And Stanley said, 'Oh, didn't you know? They were changed—they were never welded at all, because Bethlehem Steel came to us and said they didn't think we needed to do it.' " Bethlehem, which built the Citicorp tower, had made the same objection—welds were stronger than necessary, bolts were the right way to do the job. On August 1, 1974, LeMessurier's New York office—actually a venture in conjunction with an old-line Manhattan firm called the Office of James Ruderman—had accepted Bethlehem's proposal.

This news gave LeMessurier no cause for concern in the days immediately following the meeting. The choice of bolted joints was technically sound and professionally correct. Even the failure of his associates to flag him on the design change was justifiable; had every decision on the site in Manhattan waited for approval from Cambridge, the building would never have been finished. Most important, modern skyscrapers are so strong that catastrophic collapse is not considered a realistic prospect; when engineers seek to limit a building's sway, they do so for the tenants' comfort.

Yet now, a month after the May meeting, the substitution of bolted joints raised a troubling question. If the bracing system was unusually sensitive to quartering winds, as LeMessurier had just discovered, so were the joints that held it together. The question was whether the Manhattan team had considered such winds when it designed the bolts. "I didn't go into a panic over it," LeMessurier says. "But I was haunted by a hunch that it was something I'd better look into."

On July 24th, he flew to New York, where his hunch was soon confirmed: his people had taken only perpendicular winds into account. And he discovered another "subtle conceptual error," as he calls it now—one that threatened to make the situation much worse.

To understand why, one must look at the interplay of opposing forces in a windblown building. The wind causes tension in the structural members—that is, it tries to blow the building down. At the same time, some of that tension, measured in thousands, or even millions, of pounds, is offset by the force of gravity, which, by pressing the members together, tends to hold the building in place. The joints must be strong enough to resist the differential between these forces—the amount of wind tension minus the amount of compression.

Within this seemingly simple computation, however, lurks a powerful multiplier. At any given level of the building, the compression figure remains constant; the wind may blow harder, but the structure doesn't get any heavier. Thus, immense leverage can result from higher wind forces. In the Citicorp tower, the forty-per-cent increase in tension produced by a quartering wind became a hundred-and-sixty-per-cent increase on the building's bolts.

Precisely because of that leverage, a margin of safety is built into the standard formulas for calculating how strong a joint must be; these formulas are contained in an American Institute of Steel Construction specification that deals with joints in structural columns. What LeMessurier found in New York, however, was that the people on his team had disregarded the standard. They had chosen to define the diagonal wind braces not as columns but as trusses, which are exempt from the safety factor. As a result, the bolts holding the joints together were perilously few. "By then," LeMessurier says, "I was getting pretty shaky."

He later detailed these mistakes in a thirty-page document called "Project SERENE"; the acronym, both rueful and apt, stands for "Special Engineering Review of Events Nobody Envisioned." What emerges from this document, which has been confidential until now, and from interviews with LeMessurier and other principals in the events, is not malfeasance, or even negligence, but a series of miscalculations that flowed from a specific mind-set. In the case of the Citicorp tower, the first event that nobody envisioned had taken place when LeMessurier sketched, on a restaurant napkin, a bracing system with an inherent sensitivity to quartering winds. None of his associates identified this as a problem, let alone understood that they were compounding it with their fuzzy semantics. In the stiff, angular language of "Project SERENE," "consideration of wind from non-perpendicular directions on ordinary rectangular buildings is generally not discussed in the literature or in the classroom."

LeMessurier tried to take comfort from another element of Citicorp's advanced design: the building's tuned mass damper. This machine, built at his behest and perched where the bells would have been if the Citicorp tower had been a cathedral, was essentially a four-hundred-and-ten-ton block of concrete, attached to huge springs and floating on a film of oil. When the building swayed, the block's inertia worked to damp the movement and calm tenants' queasy stomachs. Reducing sway was of special importance, because the Citicorp tower was an unusually lightweight building; the twenty-five thousand tons of steel in its skeleton contrasted with the Empire State Building's sixty-thousand-ton superstructure. Yet the damper, the first of its kind in a large building, was never meant to be a safety device. At best, the machine might reduce the danger, not dispel it.

BEFORE making a final judgment on how dangerous the bolted joints were, LeMessurier turned to a Canadian engineer named Alan Davenport, the director of the Boundary Layer Wind Tunnel Laboratory, at the University of Western Ontario, and a world authority on the behavior of buildings in high winds. During the Citicorp tower's design, Davenport had run extensive tests on scale models of the structure. Now LeMessurier asked him and his deputy to retrieve the relevant files and magnetic tapes. "If we were going to think about such things as the possibility of failure," LeMessurier says—the word "failure" being a euphemism for the Citicorp tower's falling down—"we would think about it in terms of the best knowledge that the state of the art can produce, which is what these guys could provide for me."

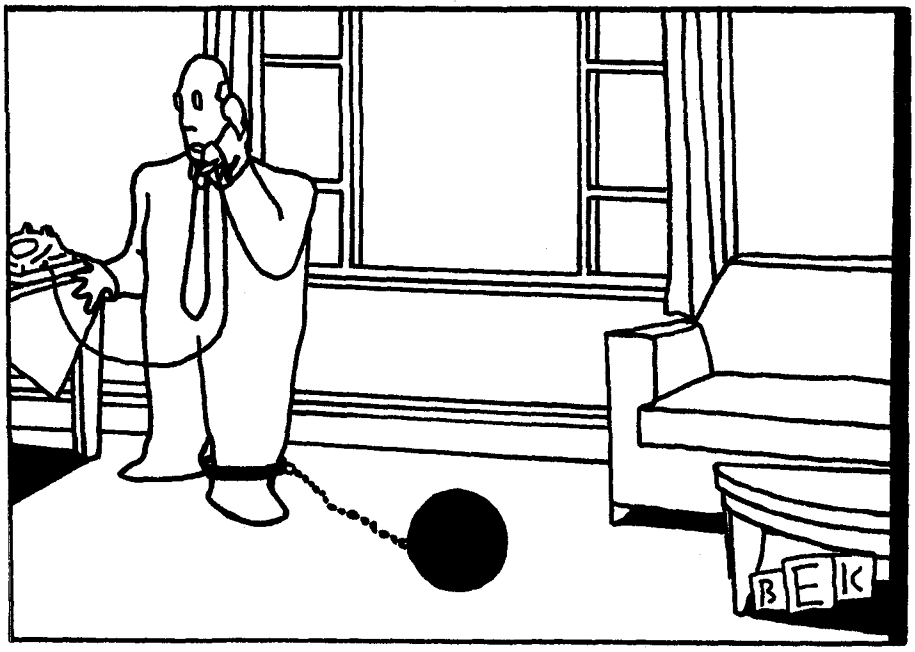
On July 26th, he flew to London, Ontario, and met with Davenport. Presenting his new calculations, LeMessurier asked the Canadians to evaluate them in the light of the original data. "And you have to tell me the truth," he added. "Don't go easy if it doesn't come out the right way."

It didn't, and they didn't. The tale told by the wind-tunnel experts was more alarming than LeMessurier had expected. His assumption of a forty-percent increase in stress from diagonal winds was theoretically correct, but it could go higher in the real world, when storms lashed at the building and set it vibrating like a tuning fork. "Oh, my God," he thought, "now we've got that on top of an error from the bolts being underdesigned." Refining their data further, the Canadians teased out wind-tunnel forces for each structural member in the building, with and without the tuned mass damper in operation; it remained for LeMessurier to interpret the numbers' meaning.

First, he went to Cambridge, where he talked to a trusted associate, and then he called his wife at their summerhouse in Maine. "Dorothy knew what I was up to," he says. "I told her, 'I think we've got a problem here, and I'm going to sit down and try to think about it.' " On July 28th, he drove to the northern shore of Sebago Lake, took an outboard motorboat a quarter of a mile across the water to his house on a twelve-acre private island, and worked through the wind-tunnel numbers, joint by joint and floor by floor.

The weakest joint, he discovered, was at the building's thirtieth floor; if that one gave way, catastrophic failure of the whole structure would follow. Next, he took New York City weather records provided by Alan Davenport and calculated the probability of a storm severe enough to tear that joint apart. His figures told him that such an event had a statistical probability of occurring as often as once every sixteen years—what meteorologists call a sixteen-year storm.

"That was very low, awesomely low," LeMessurier said, his voice hushed as if the horror of discovery were still fresh. "To put it another way, there was one chance in sixteen in any year, including



"It was her dying wish."

that one." When the steadying influence of the tuned mass damper was factored in, the probability dwindled to one in fifty-five—a fifty-five-year storm. But the machine required electric current, which might fail as soon as a major storm hit.

As an experienced engineer, LeMessurier liked to think he could solve most structural problems, and the Citicorp tower was no exception. The bolted joints were readily accessible, thanks to Hugh Stubbins' insistence on putting the chevrons inside the building's skin rather than displaying them outside. With money and materials, the joints could be reinforced by welding heavy steel plates over them, like giant Band-Aids. But time was short; this was the end of July, and the height of the hurricane season was approaching. To avert disaster, LeMessurier would have to blow the whistle quickly—on himself. That meant facing the pain of possible protracted litigation, probable bankruptcy, and professional disgrace. It also meant shock and dismay for Citicorp's officers and shareholders when they learned that the bank's proud new corporate symbol, built at a cost of a hundred and seventy-five million dollars, was threatened with collapse.

On the island, LeMessurier considered his options. Silence was one of them; only Davenport knew the full implications of what he had found, and he would not disclose them on his own. Suicide was another; if LeMessurier drove along the Maine Turnpike at a hundred miles an hour and steered into a bridge abutment, that would be that. But keeping silent required betting other people's lives against the odds, while suicide struck him as a coward's way out and—although he was passionate about nineteenth-century classical music—unconvincingly melodramatic. What seized him an instant later was entirely convincing, because it was so unexpected—an almost giddy sense of power. "I had information that nobody else in the world had," LeMessurier recalls. "I had power in my hands to effect extraordinary events that only I could initiate. I mean, sixteen years to failure—that was very simple, very clear-cut. I almost said, 'Thank you, dear Lord, for making this problem so sharply defined that there's no choice to make.' "

AT his office in Cambridge on the morning of Monday, July 31st, LeMessurier tried to reach Hugh Stubbins, whose firm was upstairs in the same building, but Stubbins was in California and unavailable by phone. Then he called Stubbins' lawyer, Carl Sapers, and outlined the emergency over lunch. Sapers advised him against telling Citicorp until he had consulted with his own company's liability insurers, the Northbrook Insurance Company, in Northbrook, Illinois. When LeMessurier called Northbrook, which represented the Office of James Ruderman as well, someone there referred him to the company's attorneys in New York and warned him not to discuss the matter with anyone else.

At 9 A.M. on Tuesday, in New York, LeMessurier faced a battery of lawyers who, he says, "wanted to meet me to find out if I was nutty." Being lawyers, not engineers, they were hard put to reconcile his dispassionate tone with the apocalyptic thrust of his prophecy. They also bridled at his carefully qualified answers to seemingly simple questions. When they asked how big a storm it would take to blow the building down, LeMessurier confined himself to statistical probabilities—a storm that might occur once in sixteen years.

When they pressed him for specific wind velocities—would the wind have to be at eighty miles per hour, or ninety, or ninety-five?—he insisted that such figures were not significant in themselves, since every structure was uniquely sensitive to certain winds; an eighty-five-mile-per-hour wind that blew for sixteen minutes from the northwest might pose less of a threat to a particular building than an eighty-mile-per-hour wind that blew for fourteen minutes from the southwest.

But the lawyers certainly understood that they had a crisis on their hands, so they sent for an expert adviser they

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WOMAN POLICE OFFICER IN ELEVATOR

Not that I'd ever noticed
Either a taste or a distaste
For that supposedly arousing
Rebus of pain and desire the uniformed woman,
Whether as Dietrich in epaulettes,
Or armored like Penthesilea, or in thigh boots
And cocked hat, straddling the Atlantic,
Fishing for campesinos
With live torpedoes,

But when the rattling, john-sized
Tenement elevator paused
Mid-fall to blink a female housing cop
Into its humid cranium, I felt her presence
Spooling through me like a Möbius strip
Splicing her spilling curls, nightstick, the gun at her hip,
Chrome shield, the breast it emblazoned,
Seamlessly into the same
Restless continuum . . .

I caught—was it possible?—
The scent of some sweet-tinctured oil;
Troubling, alluring; and looked away,
Then glanced back obliquely; had I imagined it,
That sudden scimitar-glint of danger,
Or had some forbidden impulse—longing, lust, anger—
Tumid inside me like a hidden
Semiautomatic
In a schoolkid's lunch pack

Triggered the blue-lashed, tiny
Metal detector of her eye?
I backed against my corner, watching
The numerals slowly swallow their green gulp of light;
Interminable! And as we fell,
Our little locked cube of stale air seemed to bristle
With a strange menace . . . I thought of harms;
My own and not my own,
Contemplated or done;

Betrayals, infidelities,
Coercions, seductions, lies,
Ready to confess them all, and more,
As if in her firm indifference she'd regressed me
Inward down some atavistic line
To the original essence, the masculine
Criminal salt; a frieze of victims
Panelled in my own skull
Like a lit cathedral hell . . .

A shudder, and then stillness;
Avoidance of each other's eyes
As in some bedroom fiasco's wake,
The air too brimful with disclosure, till the door
Opened and we parted, the clamped rift
Between us widening like a continental drift
Of the sexes; she to the butcher, the breaker,
The ripper, the rapist,
I to my therapist.

—James Lasdun

trusted: Leslie Robertson, an engineer who had been a structural consultant for the World Trade Center. "I got a phone call out of the blue from some lawyer summoning me to a meeting," Robertson says. " 'What's it about?' 'You'll find out when you get there.' 'Sorry, I have other things to do—I don't attend meetings on that basis.' A few minutes later, I got another call, from another lawyer, who said there'd been a problem with Citicorp Center. I went to the meeting that morning, and I didn't know anybody there but Bill. He stood up and explained what he perceived were the difficulties with the building, and everyone, of course, was very concerned. Then they turned to me and said, 'Well?' I said, 'Look, if this is in fact the case, you have a very serious problem.' "

The two structural engineers were peers, but not friends. LeMessurier was a visionary with a fondness for heroic designs, though he was also an energetic manager. Robertson was a stickler for technical detail, a man fascinated by how things fit together. LeMessurier, older by two years, was voluble and intense, with a courtly rhetorical style. Robertson was tall, trim, brisk, and edgily funny, but made no effort to hide his impatience with things that didn't interest him.

In addition to his engineering expertise, Robertson brought to the table a background in disaster management. He had worked with such groups as the National Science Foundation and the National Research Council on teams that studied the aftermaths of earthquakes, hurricanes, and floods. (In 1993, he worked with the F.B.I. on the World Trade Center bombing.) For the liability lawyers, this special perspective enhanced his stature as a consultant, but it unsettled LeMessurier from the start. As he remembers it, "Robertson predicted to everybody present that within hours of the time Citicorp heard about this the whole building would be evacuated. I almost fainted. I didn't want that to happen." (For his part, Robertson recalls making no such dire prediction.)

LeMessurier didn't think an evacuation would be necessary. He believed that the building was safe for occupancy in all but the most violent weather, thanks to the tuned mass damper, and he insisted that the damper's reliability in a storm could be assured by installing emergency generators. Robertson conceded the importance of keeping the damper running—it had performed flawlessly since it became operational earlier that year—but, because, in his view, its value as a safety device was unproved, he flatly refused to consider it as a mitigating factor. (In a conversation shortly after the World Trade Center bombing, Robertson noted dryly that the twin towers' emergency generators "lasted for fifteen minutes.")

One point on which everyone agreed was that LeMessurier, together with Stubbins, needed to inform Citicorp as soon as possible. Only Stubbins had ever dealt directly with Citicorp's chairman, Walter B. Wriston, and he was flying home that same day from California and still didn't know his building was flawed. That evening, LeMessurier took the shuttle to Boston, went to Stubbins' house in Cambridge, and broke the news. "He winced, I must admit—here was his masterpiece," LeMessurier says. "But he's a man of enormous resilience, a very grown man, and fortunately we had a lifelong relationship of trust."

The next morning, August 2nd, Stubbins and LeMessurier flew to New York, went to LeMessurier's office at 515 Madison Avenue, put in a call to Wriston, but failed to penetrate the layers of secretaries and assistants that insulated Citicorp's chairman from the outside world. They were no more successful in reaching the bank's president, William I. Spencer, but Stubbins finally managed to get an appointment with Citicorp's executive vice-president, John S. Reed, the man who has now succeeded Wriston as chairman. LeMessurier and Stubbins went to see Reed at the bank's ornate executive offices, in an older building on Lexington Avenue, across the street from Citicorp Center. LeMessurier began by saying, "I have a real problem for you, sir."

Reed was well equipped to understand the problem. He had an engineering background, and he had been involved in the design and construction of Citicorp Center; the company had called him in when it was considering the tuned mass damper. Reed listened impassively as LeMessurier detailed the structural defect and how he thought it could be fixed. LeMessurier says, "I'd already conceived that you could build a little plywood house around each of the connections that were critical, and a welder could work inside it without damaging the tenants' space. You might have to take up the carpet, take down the Sheetrock, and work at night, but all this could be done. But the real message I conveyed to him was 'I need your help—at once.' "

When Reed asked how much the repairs would cost, LeMessurier offered an estimate of a million dollars. At the end of the meeting, which lasted half an hour, Reed thanked the two men courteously, though noncommittally, and told them to go back to their office and await further instructions. They did so, but after waiting for more than an hour they decided to go out to lunch. As they were finishing their meal, a secretary from LeMessurier's office called to say that John Reed would be in the office in ten minutes with Walter Wriston.

In the late nineteen-seventies, when Citicorp began its expansion into global banking, Wriston was one of the most influential bankers in the country. A tall man of piercing intelligence, he was not known for effusiveness in the best of circumstances, and LeMessurier expected none now, what with Citicorp Center—and his own career—literally hanging in the balance. But the bank's chairman was genuinely proud of the building, and he offered his full support in getting it fixed.

"Wriston was fantastic," LeMessurier says. "He said, 'I guess my job is to handle the public relations of this, so I'll have to start drafting a press release.' " But he didn't have anything to write on, so someone handed him a yellow pad. That made him laugh. According to LeMessurier, " 'All wars,' Wriston said, 'are won by generals writing on yellow pads.' " In fact, Wriston simply took notes; the press release would not go out for six days. But his laughter put the others at ease. Citicorp's general was on their side.

WITHIN hours of Wriston's visit, LeMessurier's office arranged for emergency generators for the tower's tuned mass damper. The bank issued beepers to LeMessurier and his key engineers, assuring them that Reed and other top managers could be reached by phone at any hour of the day or night. Citicorp also assigned two vice-presidents, Henry DeFord III and Robert Dexter, to manage the repairs; both had overseen the building's construction and knew it well.

The next morning, Thursday, August 3rd, LeMessurier, Robertson, and four of LeMessurier's associates met with DeFord and Dexter in a conference room on the thirtieth floor of Citicorp Center. (The decision to hold the initial meeting near the structure's weakest point was purely coincidental.) LeMessurier outlined his plan to fix the wind braces by welding two-inch-thick steel plates over each of more than two hundred bolted joints. The plan was tentatively approved, pending actual examination of a typical joint, but putting it into effect depended on the availability of a contractor and on an adequate supply of steel plate. Since Bethlehem Steel had dropped out of the business of fabricating and erecting skyscraper structures, Robertson suggested Karl Koch Erecting, a New Jersey-based firm that had put up the World Trade Center.

"I called them," Robertson says, "and got, 'Well, we're a little busy right now,' and I said, 'Hey, you don't understand what we're talking about here.' " A few hours later, two Koch engineers joined the meeting. LeMessurier and Robertson took them to an unoccupied floor of the building, and there workmen tore apart enough Sheetrock to expose a diagonal connection. Comparing the original drawings of the joints with the nuts-and-bolts reality before their eyes, the engineers concluded that LeMessurier's plan was indeed feasible. Koch also happened to have all the necessary steel plate on hand, so Citicorp negotiated a contract for welding to begin as soon as LeMessurier's office could issue new drawings.

Two more contracts were drawn up before the end of the following day. One of them went out to MTS Systems Corporation, the Minneapolis firm that had manufactured the tuned mass damper. MTS was asked to provide full-time technical support—in effect, around-the-clock nurses—to keep its machine in perfect health. The company flew one of its technicians to New York that night. Four days later, in a letter of agreement, MTS asked Citicorp to provide a long list of materials and spare parts, which included three buckets, a grease gun, rags, cleaning solvent, and "1 Radio with weather band."

The other contract engaged a California firm, also recommended by Robertson, to fit the building with a number of instruments called strain gauges—pieces of tape with zigzag wires running through them. The gauges would be affixed to individual structural members, and electrical impulses from them would be funnelled to an improvised communications center in Robertson's office, eight blocks away, at 230 Park Avenue; like a patient in intensive care, the tower would have every shiver and twitch monitored. But this required new telephone lines, and the phone company refused to budge on its leisurely installation schedule. When Robertson voiced his frustration about this during a late-night meeting in Walter Wriston's office, Wriston picked up the phone on his desk and called his friend Charles Brown, the president and chief operating officer of A.T. & T. The new lines went in the next morning.

A different problem-solving approach was taken by Robertson during another nighttime meeting in Citicorp's executive suite. Wriston wanted copies of some documents that Robertson had shown him, but all the secretaries had gone home—the only people on the floor were Wriston, Robertson, and John Reed—and every copying machine was locked. "I'm an engineer," Robertson says, "so I kneeled down, ripped the door off one of the machines, and we made our copies. I looked up at them a little apologetically, but, what the hell—fixing the door was a few hundred bucks, and these guys had a hundred-and-seventy-five-million-dollar building in trouble across the street."

Robertson also assembled an advisory group of weather experts from academia and the government's Brookhaven National Laboratory, on Long Island, and hired two independent weather forecasters to provide wind predictions four times a day. "What worried us more than hurricanes, which give you hours and days to anticipate, were unpredictable events," Robertson says. "From time to time, we've had small tornadoes in this area, and there was a worry that a much bigger one would come down and take hold." Then Robertson raised an issue that LeMessurier had dreaded discussing. In a meeting on Friday that included LeMessurier, Robertson told Citicorp's representatives, DeFord and Dexter, that they needed to plan for evacuating Citicorp Center and a large area around it in the event of a high-wind alert.

DURING the first week of August, discussions had involved only a small circle of company officials and engineers. But the circle widened on Monday, August 7th, when final drawings for the steel plates went out to Arthur Nusbaum, the veteran project manager of HRH Construction, which was the original contractor for Citicorp Center, and Nusbaum, in turn, provided them to Koch Erecting. And it would widen again, because work could not go forward, as Robertson reminded the officials, without consulting the city's Department of Buildings. Citicorp faced a public-relations debacle unless it came up with a plausible explanation of why its brand-new skyscraper needed fixing.

That night, DeFord and Dexter, following Robertson's advice, met with Mike Reilly, the American Red Cross's director of disaster services for the New York metropolitan area. "They laid out the dilemma, and it was clearly an ominous event," Reilly recalls. From that first meeting, which was attended by Robertson but not by LeMessurier, and from half a dozen subsequent working sessions with other disaster agencies, came plans for joint action by the police and the mayor's Office of Emergency Management, along with the Red Cross. In the event of a wind alert, the police and the mayor's emergency forces would evacuate the building and the surrounding neighborhood, and the Red Cross would mobilize between twelve hundred and two thousand workers to provide food and temporary shelter. "Hal DeFord was the bank's point man for all this," Reilly says. "The anxiety was so heavy on him that we wondered if he was going to make it."

"Yes, we know them. We like them, but we're not crazy about, you know, the other him."

• •

On Tuesday morning, August 8th, the public-affairs department of Citibank, Citicorp's chief subsidiary, put out the long-delayed press release. In language as bland as a loan officer's wardrobe, the three-paragraph document said unnamed "engineers who designed the building" had recommended that "certain of the connections in Citicorp Center's wind bracing system be strengthened through additional welding." The engineers, the press release added, "have assured us that there is no danger." When DeFord expanded on the handout in interviews, he portrayed the bank as a corporate citizen of exemplary caution—"We wear both belts and suspenders here," he told a reporter for the *News*—that had decided on the welds as soon as it learned of new data based on dynamic-wind tests conducted at the University of Western Ontario.

There was some truth in all this. During LeMessurier's recent trip to Canada, one of Alan Davenport's assistants had mentioned to him that probable wind velocities might be slightly higher, on a statistical basis, than predicted in 1973, during the original tests for Citicorp Center. At the time, LeMessurier viewed this piece of information as one more nail in the coffin of his career, but later, recognizing it as a blessing in disguise, he passed it on to Citicorp as the possible basis of a cover story for the press and for tenants in the building.

On Tuesday afternoon, at a meeting in Robertson's office, LeMessurier told the whole truth to New York City's Acting Building Commissioner and nine other senior city officials. For more than an hour, he spoke about the effect of diagonal winds on the Citicorp tower, about the failure of his own office to perceive and communicate the danger, and about the intended repairs.

In the discussion that followed, the city officials asked a few technical questions, and Arthur Nusbaum expressed concern over a shortage of certified welders who had passed the city's structural-welding test. That would not be a problem, the representatives from the Department of Buildings replied; one of the area's most trusted steel inspectors, Neil Moreton, would have the power to test and immediately certify any welder that Citicorp's repair project required. Nusbaum recalls, "Once they said that, I knew we were O.K., because there were steamfitter welders all over the place who could do a fantastic job."

Before the city officials left, they commended LeMessurier for his courage and candor, and expressed a desire to be kept informed as the repair work progressed. Given the urgency of the situation, that was all they could reasonably do. “It wasn’t a case of ‘We caught you, you skunk,’ ” Nusbaum says. “It started with a guy who stood up and said, ‘I got a problem, I made the problem, let’s fix the problem.’ If you’re gonna kill a guy like LeMessurier, why should anybody ever talk?”

Meanwhile, Robertson’s switchboard was besieged by calls. “Every reporter in town wanted to know how come all these people were in our office,” Robertson says. Once the meeting ended, the Building Commissioner returned the reporters’ calls and, hewing to Citicorp’s line, reassured them that the structural work was only a prudent response to new meteorological data.

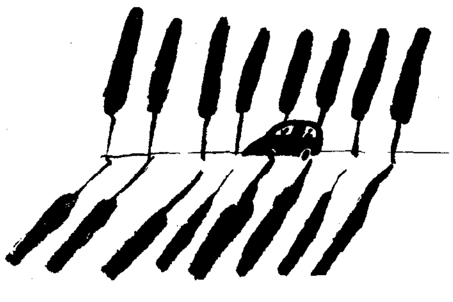
As a result, press coverage in New York City the next day was as uninformative as the handout: a short piece in the *Wall Street Journal*, which raised no questions about the nature of the new data, and one in the *News*, which dutifully quoted DeFord’s remark about belts and suspenders. But when LeMessurier went back to his hotel room, at about 5 P.M. on Wednesday, he learned from his wife, who had come down from Cambridge to join him, that a reporter from the *Times* had been trying to reach him all afternoon. That worried him greatly; being candid with city officials was one thing, but being interrogated by the *Times* was another. Before returning the call, LeMessurier phoned his friend Carl Sapers, the Boston attorney who represented Hugh Stubbins, and mixed himself a Martini. Sapers understood the need for secrecy, but he saw no real choice; talk to them, he said, and do the best you can. Two minutes after six o’clock, LeMessurier called the *Times* switchboard. As he braced himself for an unpleasant conversation, he heard a recording. The *Times,* along with all the other major papers in the city, had just been shut down by a strike.

WELDERS started work almost immediately, their torches a dazzlement in the night sky. The weather was sticky, as it had been since the beginning of the month—New Jersey’s tomato crop was rotting from too much rain—and forecasts called for temperatures in the mid-eighties the next day, with no wind; in other words, a perfect day for Citicorp Center.

Yet tropical storms were already churning the Caribbean. Citicorp pushed for repair work around the clock, but Nusbaum refused to allow welding during office hours, for fear that clouds of acrid smoke would cause panic among the tenants and set off every smoke detector in the building. Instead, he brought in drywall crews and carpenters to work from 5 P.M. to 8 P.M., putting up plywood enclosures around the chevrons and tearing down Sheetrock; welders to weld from 8 P.M. until 4 A.M., with the building’s fire-alarm system shut off; and then laborers to clean up the epic mess before the first secretaries arrived.

The welders worked seven days a week. Sometimes they worked on unoccupied floors; sometimes they invaded lavish offices. But décor, or the lack of it, had no bearing on their priorities, which were set by LeMessurier. “It was a tense time for the whole month,” he says. “I was constantly calculating which joint to fix next, which level of the building was more critical, and I developed charts and graphs of all the consequences: if you fix this, then the rarity of the storm that will cause any trouble lengthens to that.”

At Robertson’s office, a steady stream of data poured in from the weather forecasters and from the building itself. Occasionally, the strain-gauge readings jumped, like spikes on an electrocardiogram, when the technicians from MTS Systems exercised their tuned mass damper to make sure it was working properly. One time, the readings went off the chart, then stopped. This provoked more bafflement than fear, since it seemed unlikely that a hurricane raging on Lexington and Fifty-third Street would go otherwise unnoticed at Forty-sixth and Park. The cause proved to be straightforward enough: When the instrumentation experts from California installed their strain gauges, they had neglected to hire union electricians. “Someone heard about it,” LeMessurier says, “went up there in the middle of the night, and snipped all the wires.”



For most of August, the weather smiled on Citicorp, or at least held its breath, and the welders made steady progress. LeMessurier felt confident enough to fly off with his wife for a weekend in Maine. As their return flight was coming in for a landing at LaGuardia Airport Sunday night, they looked out across the East River and saw a pillar of fire on the Manhattan skyline. “The welders were working up and down the building, fixing the joints,” LeMessurier recalls. “It was an absolutely marvellous thing to see. I said to Dorothy, ‘Isn’t this wonderful? Nobody knows what’s going on, but we know and we can see it right there in the sky.’ ”

A great deal of work remained. Robertson was insisting on a complete reëvaluation of the Citicorp tower: not just the sensitivity of the chevrons to quartering winds but the strength of other skeletal members, the adequacy of braces that kept the supporting columns in plumb, and the rigidity of the building’s corrugated metal-and-concrete floors, which Robertson feared might be compromised by trenches carrying electrical connections.

His insistence was proper—settling for less would have compromised Robertson’s own position. It amounted to a post-construction autopsy by teams of forensic engineers. For LeMessurier, the reëvaluation was harrowing in the extreme; every new doubt about his design for Citicorp Center reflected on him.

In one instance, Robertson’s fears were unwarranted: tests showed that the tower floors were entirely sound—the trenches were not a source of weakness. In another, Robertson, assuming the worst about construction tolerances, decided that the columns might be slightly, even though undetectably, out of plumb, and therefore he ordered the installation of supplemental bracing above the fourteenth floor.

Shortly before dawn on Friday, September 1st, weather services carried the news that everyone had been dreading—a major storm, Hurricane Ella, was off Cape Hatteras and heading for New York. At 6:30 A.M., an emergency-planning group convened at the command center in Robertson’s office. “Nobody said, ‘We’re probably going to press the panic button,’ ” LeMessurier recalls. “Nobody dared say that. But everybody was sweating blood."

As the storm bore down on the city, the bank's representatives, DeFord and Dexter, asked LeMessurier for a report on the status of repairs. He told them that the most critical joints had already been fixed and that the building, with its tuned mass damper operating, could now withstand a two-hundred-year storm. It didn't have to, however. A few hours later, Hurricane Ella veered from its northwesterly course and began moving out to sea.

LeMessurier spent the following night in Manhattan, having cancelled plans to spend the Labor Day weekend with his family in Maine. But the hurricane kept moving eastward, and daybreak dispelled any lingering thoughts of evacuation. "Saturday was the most beautiful day that the world's ever seen," LeMessurier says, "with all the humidity drawn away and the skies sunny and crystal clear." Alone in the city, he gave himself a treat he'd been thinking about for years—his first visit to the Cloisters, where he basked in an ineffable calm.

THE weather watch ended on September 13th. That same day, Robertson recommended terminating the evacuation plans, too. Welding was completed in October, several weeks before most of the city's newspapers resumed publication. No further stories on the subject appeared in the wake of the strike. The building, in fact, was now strong enough to withstand a seven-hundred-year storm even without the damper, which made it one of the safest structures ever built—and rebuilt—by the hand of man.

Throughout the summer, Citicorp's top management team had concentrated on facilitating repairs, while keeping the lawyers on the sidelines. That changed on September 13th, when Citicorp served notice on LeMessurier and Hugh Stubbins, whose firm held the primary contract, of its intention to seek indemnification for all costs. Their estimate of the costs, according to LeMessurier, amounted to $4.3 million, including management fees. A much higher total was suggested by Arthur Nusbaum, who recalled that his firm, HRH Construction, spent eight million dollars on structural repairs alone. Citicorp has declined to provide its own figure.

Whatever the actual cost, Citicorp's effort to recoup it was remarkably free of the punitive impulse that often poisons such negotiations. When the terms of a settlement were first discussed—without lawyers—by LeMessurier, on one side, and DeFord and Dexter, on the other, LeMessurier spoke of two million dollars, which was the amount that his liability insurer, the Northbrook Insurance Company, had agreed to pay. "DeFord and Dexter said, 'Well, we've been deeply wounded here,' and they tried to play hardball," LeMessurier says. "But they didn't do it with much conviction." After a second meeting, which included a Northbrook lawyer, the bank agreed to hold Stubbins' firm harmless and to accept the two-million-dollar payment from LeMessurier and his joint-venture partners; no litigation ever ensued. Eight years ago, Citicorp turned the building into a condominium, retaining the land and the shops but selling all the office space, to Japanese buyers, at a handsome profit.

The crisis at Citicorp Center was noteworthy in another respect. It produced heroes, but no villains; everyone connected with the repairs behaved in exemplary fashion, from Walter Wriston and his Citicorp management team to the officials at the city's Department of Buildings. The most striking example, of course, was set by LeMessurier, who emerged with his reputation not merely unscathed but enhanced. When Robertson speaks of him, he says, "I have a lot of admiration for Bill, because he was very forthcoming. While we say that all engineers would behave as he did, I carry in my mind some skepticism about that."

In the last few years, LeMessurier has been talking about the summer of 1978 to his classes at Harvard. The tale, as he tells it, is by turns painful, self-deprecating, and self-dramatizing—an engineer who did the right thing. But it also speaks to the larger question of how professional people should behave. "You have a social obligation," LeMessurier reminds his students. "In return for getting a license and being regarded with respect, you're supposed to be self-sacrificing and look beyond the interests of yourself and your client to society as a whole. And the most wonderful part of my story is that when I did it nothing bad happened." ♦

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A REPORTER AT LARGE

STATE SECRETS

Thirty years ago, Mississippi felt more like a foreign tyranny—hostile, suspicious, sometimes violent—than like part of the American Union. Now the files of the state's shadowy Sovereignty Commission are coming to light.

BY CALVIN TRILLIN

WHEN it comes to the operations of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, I have always been partial to the smaller stories. Consider, for example, the Grenada, Mississippi, baby inspection. In the early sixties, a white woman in Grenada, a county seat in the north-central part of the state, gave birth to an out-of-wedlock baby, and there were rumors around town that the baby had been fathered by a black man. The State Sovereignty Commission had been established by the legislature in 1956, in the days when the white South was erecting its defenses against the decision of the United States Supreme Court, in Brown v. Board of Education, that segregation in public education is unconstitutional. The Commission was charged to "do and perform any and all acts and things deemed necessary and proper to protect the sovereignty of the State of Mississippi, and her sister states, from encroachment thereon by the federal government." Being an agency that always interpreted that mission broadly, it dispatched one of its investigators, Tom Scarbrough, to see if Grenada had truly been the scene of what Southern politicians of that era tended to call the mongrelization of the races.

After interviewing a number of Grenada residents, Scarbrough accompanied the local sheriff for an inspection of the baby under suspicion. It's easy to envision those two officials of the State of Mississippi trying to edge in close to the crib—large men, as I imagine them, with the sheriff wearing a pistol and further burdened, perhaps, by what people in regular contact with the Southern law-enforcement community come to think of as a sheriff's belly. In Scarbrough's report, which ran four or five thousand words, he wrote, "I was looking at the child's fingernails and the end of its fingers very closely." From this I assume that he believed African ancestry could be detected by the presence of distinctive half-moons at the cuticles—a theory that was an article of faith in my grade school in Missouri, during a period when I was also persuaded for a while that Japanese people had yellow blood. The baby's fingernails might have been too small for a conclusive half-moon search. Scarbrough said in his report, "We both agreed we were not qualified to say it was a part Negro child, but we could say it was not 100 percent Caucasian." Perhaps sensing this indecision, the mother parried shrewdly: the baby's father, she said, was Italian.

Even as a connoisseur of the smaller stories, I acknowledge that the big stories do carry a certain impact. Officially, the files of the State Sovereignty Commission remain sealed until a lawsuit to open them, which began in federal district court in 1977, is finally resolved. But the activity surrounding the suit has already dislodged formerly secret information that has resulted in front-page headlines about stories that made front-page headlines the first time around. It is now known, for instance, that an early black applicant to the University of Southern Mississippi who was convicted of several crimes and thrown into prison was framed; an alternative plan was to murder him. It is known that during the 1964 trial of Byron De La Beckwith for the murder of Medgar Evers the Sovereignty Commission investigated potential jurors for the defense and furnished such capsule biographies as "He is a contractor and believed to be Jewish." It is known that the Sovereignty Commission got weekly reports from paid spies within the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), the umbrella organization of the 1964 voter-registration effort known as the Mississippi Summer Project, and that it distributed license-plate numbers of COFO cars, including the one that Michael Schwerner and James Chaney and Andrew Goodman had been riding in before they were murdered, in Neshoba County, that summer.

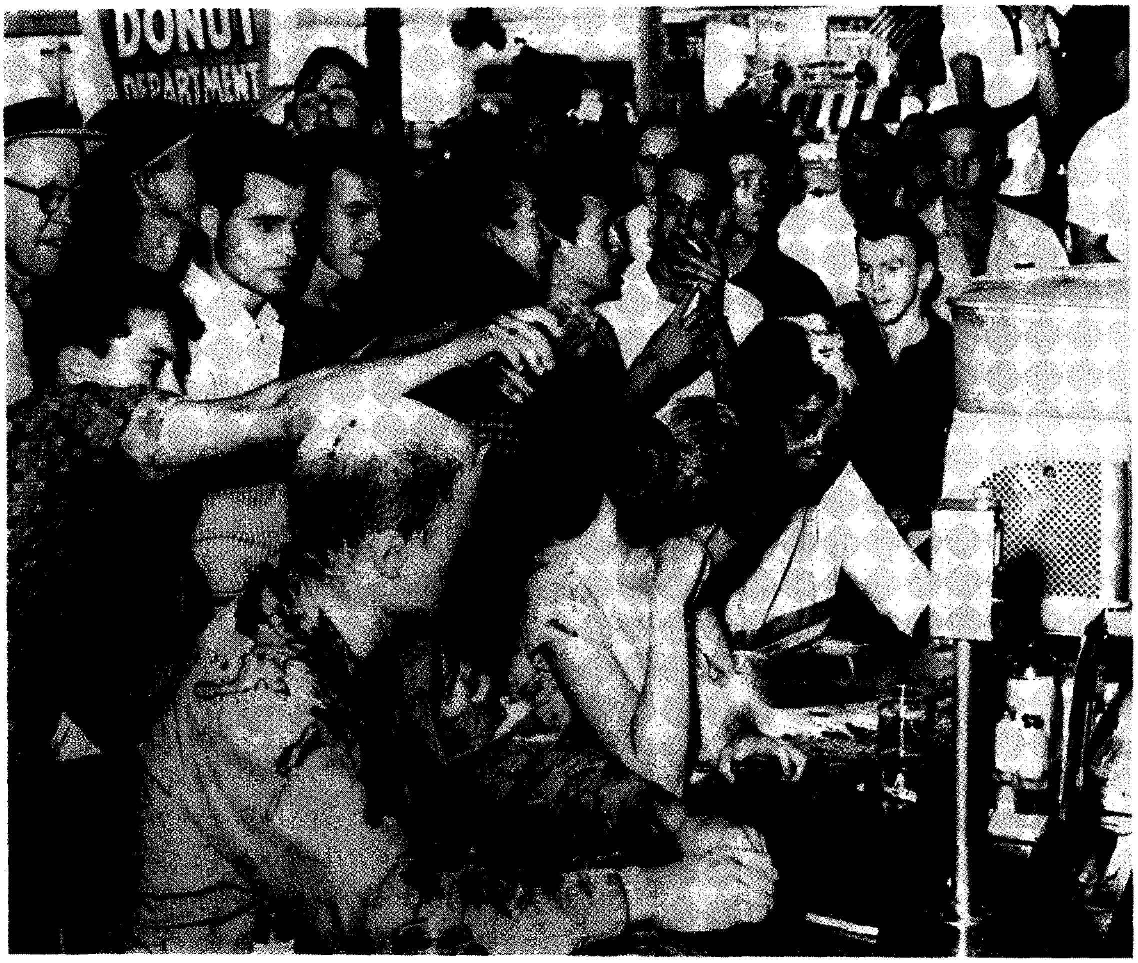
In 1990, such stories, based on State Sovereignty Commission documents, ran for eight pages one day in the Jackson *Clarion-Ledger*, which reported not only that a black newspaper editor had been on the Commission's payroll—one of his duties was to run a story, furnished by the Sovereignty Commission, that linked Martin Luther King, Jr., to the Communist Party—but that the *Clarion-Ledger* itself had routinely killed stories that the Sovereignty Commission wanted killed and run stories that the Sovereignty Commission wanted run. According to a memo quoted in the *Clarion-Ledger* in 1990 by Jerry Mitchell, the reporter who revealed many of the Sovereignty Commission documents, the Commission had even prevailed on the Jackson newspapers to drop the honorific "Rev." from the names of ministers who were civil-rights activists: "Our friends of the press could drop their titles from news articles and if queried they could say they do not consider them as ministers 'as how can a man profess to serve God when he is actually serving atheistic Communism?' "

For me, practically any document in the secret files of the State Sovereignty Commission has a certain resonance: at the beginning of the sixties, I was in and out of Mississippi, originally as a reporter for the Southern bureau of *Time*. I can now place the source, say, of a front-page Jackson *Daily News* item that I've kept all these years—an item that begins, under a four-column headline, "Mississippi authorities have learned that the apparently endless 'freedom' rides into Mississippi and the south were planned in Havana, Cuba, last winter by officials of the Soviet Union." Reading about Tom Scarbrough's fingernail inspection brings back into focus what I came to think of during my time in the South as a regional obsession with yard-sale anthropology. Any number of white people explained to me, for instance, that the brains of black people were capable of processing specific statements but not general or abstract statements. (My response was always "Give me an example.")

But, as I go through the State Sovereignty Commission material now available, what I still find most interesting is how small a deviation from the Mississippi way of life was required to attract the attention of Scarbrough or one of his colleagues—a pastor's attendance at an interracial meeting or a professor's choice of a suspect textbook or a student's attendance at the wrong concert. That was the aspect of the Commission that had most fascinated me from the start—from the time, in 1961, when I spent a few days in the state to look into revelations that the Sovereignty Commission had tried to smear a senior at the University of Mississippi named Billy Barton, who was running for the editorship of the Ole Miss newspaper. The rumors that had been spread about Billy Barton accused him of, among other things, being a protégé of Ralph McGill—an accusation that Barton, of course, vehemently denied. He said he had never met Ralph McGill, the Atlanta newspaperman who was then widely considered by people outside the South to be the region's most distinguished journalist; and he voluntarily took a lie-detector test to confirm that statement.

Because Barton's file became public and could easily be shown to be nonsense, the case provoked some weekly newspaper editors in Mississippi into criticizing the Commission as a sort of cornpone Gestapo that had got out of hand. But in 1961 the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission had no reason to fear grumbling from a few county weeklies. It acknowledged, in a speech given around the state, that it kept a file on "persons whose utterances or actions indicate they should be watched with suspicion on future racial attitudes." It openly contributed five thousand dollars of taxpayers' money every month to the Citizens Council—sometimes referred to as the uptown Klan—which claimed a membership of ninety thousand and was considered the most influential political force in the state. Several members of the Citizens Council's executive committee also sat on the Sovereignty Commission, and some observers considered the Commission to be basically a device for providing the Citizens Council with the resources and legitimacy of the state. Except for the smattering of editorials provoked by the Billy Barton case, there was little significant opposition to any of this. Partly through the economic intimidation that was the specialty of the Citizens Council, most of Mississippi's small store of moderate and liberal whites had been silenced or driven from the state.

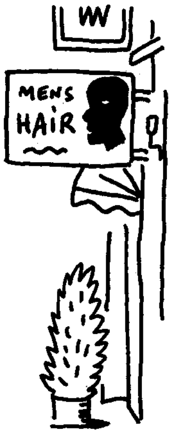
One of those who remained, an Ole Miss history professor named James W. Silver, wrote in the early sixties that "Mississippi is the way it is not because of its views on the Negro—here it is simply 'the South



John R. Salter, Jr. (front), "the mustard man," at a 1963 Jackson lunch-counter sit-in.

AP/WIDEWORLD PHOTOS

exaggerated'—but because of its closed society, its refusal to allow freedom of inquiry or to tolerate 'error of opinion.'" (Even before those words were printed in an influential book by Silver called "Mississippi: The Closed Society," the director of the State Sovereignty Commission had written to the chairman of the university's board of trustees outlining what a Commission report described as "various reasons why Dr. James Silver could be terminated from his position at the University of Mississippi without any risk of losing the University's accreditation.") Being guilty of an error of opinion did not require a drastic deviation from the Mississippi mainstream: at the time, the Citizens Council's definition of subversive organizations was broad enough to include both the Methodist Church and the United States Air Force. In other Southern states, agencies similar to the State Sovereignty Commission tended to be modest operations that left it to law-enforcement agencies to keep extensive files on people suspected of being potential "race mixers." The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, which had no law-enforcement duties, estimated that its files included information on ten thousand people. Mississippi was the only place where a state agency saw its duty as coördinating all aspects of the effort to maintain white supremacy, including propaganda films, thought control, and baby inspection. A completely closed society in one out of fifty states was not possible, of course, but any effort in that direction had to include the attention to minutiae which I found so fascinating.



After I began going to Mississippi, there were times when I had to remind myself that I was in one of the fifty states. In those days, a reporter from a magazine published in New York could feel like a visitor to a foreign land almost anywhere in the Deep South. White people who weren't simply hostile would often explain certain fundamental truths in the tone that a citizen of some exotic but long-established country might use to enlighten a slightly dim American tourist on rudimentary history: Northerners didn't understand Negroes the way Southerners did; local Negroes were perfectly content; race trouble was caused by outside agitators, who were mostly Communists. In almost any Southern state, there were leaders who made daily pronouncements that seemed foreign to what American children were supposedly taught in school (even the schools I went to in Missouri, which were segregated by law at the time) about equality and opportunity in the Land of the Free. But only Mississippi seemed to have come close to shutting out the rest of the country.

In Mississippi in 1961, there didn't seem to be any other side; it was as if a secret agreement had been made to insist that day be called night, and the entire white population of the state had been in on it. Everything appeared to be under control. The segregation of the races was complete. Voting was essentially a privilege limited to white people. Until a sit-in at the Jackson public library by students from Tougaloo, a black college on the outskirts of town, the demonstrations then sweeping other Southern cities were not seen in Jackson. Those who ran the state operated as if the Mississippi way of life were invulnerable. The State Sovereignty Commission was actually sending various prominent Mississippians to Northern service-club luncheons to talk about the tranquillity of Mississippi's race relations. The premise was not that the movement had not yet arrived in Mississippi but that it would never arrive.

In Alabama, the Freedom Riders, who came through a couple of months after the Billy Barton controversy, were attacked in Anniston and Birmingham and Montgomery; in Mississippi, residents lined the road as the bus passed, like an army under orders to stand down, and the Freedom Riders were politely arrested in the Jackson bus station for breach of peace. The next day, the governor, Ross Barnett, welcomed the reporters who were covering the Freedom Ride, and the mayor of Jackson gave each one an honorary Jackson police badge. I still have mine. (There were three black reporters on the bus, and they had not been arrested. "Professional courtesy," the police chief explained.) Among reporters in the South, Alabama was considered more dangerous then, but Mississippi, where strangers might say hello on the street and ask you how you were enjoying your visit, was somehow more ominous. Sometimes after working in Mississippi for a few days I'd drive to Memphis to write my copy and send it out. When I called my office, in Atlanta, I'd say, "I've slipped over the border."

By 1964, when Paul B. Johnson, Jr., became governor, the Mississippi monolith was beginning to show cracks. It had taken some serious hits, like the desegregation of Ole Miss, and there was enough activity by the race mixers to make Johnson's term among the busiest four years in the State Sovereignty Commission's history. Documents and reports and correspondence that the Commission routinely sent to Governor Johnson's office constitute the largest collection of Commission papers now accessible to the public. They were among the papers that the Johnson family donated to the University of Southern Mississippi, in Hattiesburg, and they were made accessible in 1989 through a state court order obtained by the *Clarion-Ledger*. The picture that emerges from the Paul Johnson papers is of a Sovereignty Commission staff, which was never very large, dashing around the state in an effort to spy on a voter-registration drive here and put an end to a boycott there. Still, as I went through the files in the W. D. McCain Library and Archives of U.S.M. one day not long ago, I found that the Commission always seemed to have time for missions of the baby-inspection variety. In 1965, for instance, Governor Johnson received a letter, written in longhand, from a couple in Biloxi. "Dear Governor Johnson," it began. "We regret to say that for the first time in our lives we need your help very badly. We are native Mississippians and are presently living in Biloxi. Our only daughter is a freshman at the University of Southern Miss. She has never before caused us any worry. However, she is in love with a Biloxi boy who looks and is said to be part Negro. . . ."

"Your recent letter and your situation fills me with great apprehension," the Governor wrote back at once. "I am having this matter investigated to the fullest." Tom Scarbrough had already been dispatched to the Gulf Coast to investigate the lineage of the suitor—presumably under orders to exercise a level of discretion that would have made a close inspection of fingernails out of the question. In a three-thousand-word report Scarbrough concluded that the young man was from a group of people in Vancleave, Missis-

"It's your father, dear—he doesn't need a warrant."

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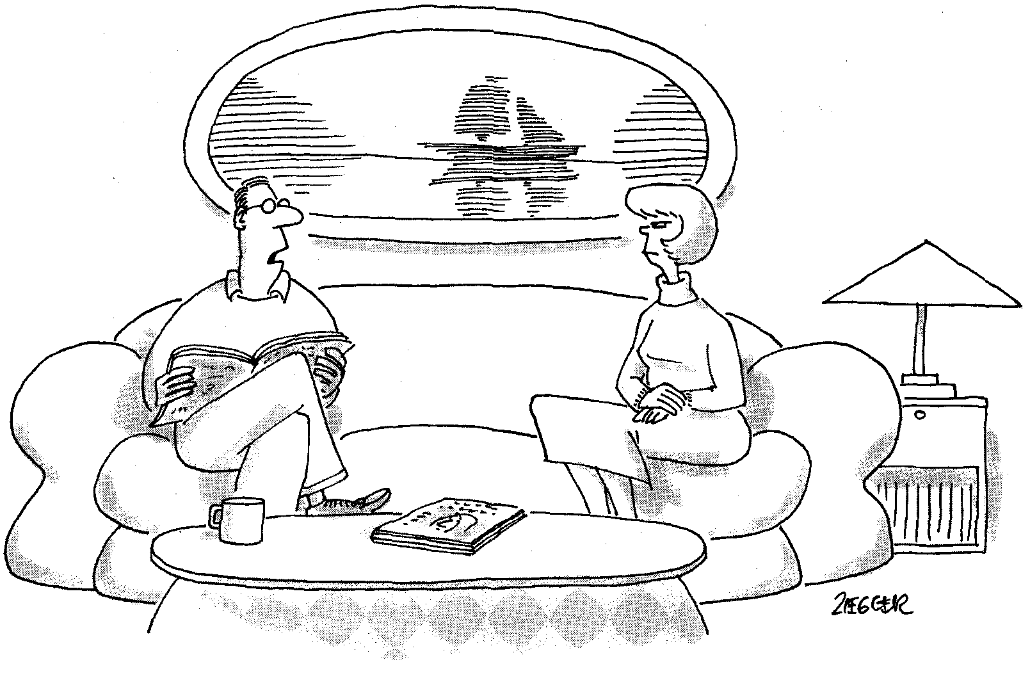
sippi, who were sometimes called "redbones" or "Vancleave Indians"—people who had always gone to white schools and churches but had always been suspected by their neighbors of being part black. (I once did a piece about a similar group, called the Turks, in South Carolina, and the standard opinion of longtime neighbors was reflected by a woman who told me, "Oh, they got some of it in 'em, all right.") The possibility of arranging to have the suitor drafted—a solution hinted at in the letter from his girlfriend's distraught parents—was looked into and dropped when it became apparent that he was too young for the draft. I couldn't find any indication in the McCain Library files that the Sovereignty Commission was able to break up the romance, but in what other state in what other period of American history could parents of no great influence write to the governor about a suitor they considered inappropriate and have the governor get right on the case?

At the McCain Library, the people who brought me a library cart full of files and collected documents to be photocopied could not have been more helpful—a fact that I would have found unremarkable except that, not having been in Mississippi on matters concerning race since the summer of 1964, when I reported on the Mississippi Summer Project for *The New Yorker*, I still remembered the narrowed eyes and suspicious looks that had in those days made me long for the moment when I could slip over the border. The University of Southern Mississippi is now integrated, of course. There are a thousand black students at Ole Miss, where the admission of one, James Meredith, once caused something close to an insurrection—unless you accept the argument of the film the Sovereignty Commission distributed about those events, which was that the federal marshals were responsible for the violence. If the librarians helping me had heard on the radio news that morning about a court ruling against a man who said he had been passed over for the job of Jackson chief of police because of racial bias, they probably hadn't been startled even for a moment by hearing later in the account that the man in question is white and the new police chief and the former police chief are both black.

Some of the people helping me with my copying weren't yet born in 1960, when W. D. McCain, the Southern Mississippi president after whom the library is named, went to Chicago to deliver a State Sovereignty Commission speech that said, among other things, "We maintain that Negroes receive better treatment and more consideration of their welfare in Mississippi than in any state in the nation" and "The Negroes prefer that control of the government remain in the white man's hands." Unless members of the library staff had reason to go through the files themselves, they would have no way of knowing that it was President McCain who received a memorandum from the director of the Sovereignty Commission dated March 2, 1964, with instructions on how to handle a black man who had announced that he was applying to the university. Confirming a conversation, the director wrote that McCain or his registrar should say to the applicant, "We have information that you are a homosexual. We also have sufficient information to prove it if necessary. If you change your mind about enrolling at an all-white university we will say no more about it. If you persist in your application, we will give this information to the press."

WHAT I had missed in Mississippi was the transition. That took a while, the pace set partly by the gradual increase in registered black voters. In 1973, a Mississippi governor vetoed the appropriations bill for the State Sovereignty Commission, although his public explanation was not that its activities were wrong or silly but that they overlapped with the activities of other agencies. In 1977, the Commission, by then moribund, was finally abolished. That left the question of what would become of its files. This was only fifteen years after Mississippi university presidents were delivering Sovereignty Commission speeches in the North and bar-association leaders were presiding over Citizens Council chapters in the Delta and virtually all Mississippi politicians were behaving in ways that black voters would have found distinctly unappealing. By an overwhelming majority, the Mississippi House of Representatives passed a bill



"I assure you, my sweet, I can't think of anyone I would rather have hound me into my grave than you."

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that read, in part, "The Secretary of State is hereby directed to destroy the said files in their entirety."

A court injunction prevented that, and the legislature instead voted to seal the files for fifty years. The injunction was part of a suit to open the files, brought by the American Civil Liberties Union of Mississippi, among others, on behalf of all those who had been spied on or smeared or harassed by the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission. The plaintiffs eventually included a collection of old comrades from the civil-rights movement. There was the Delta Ministry, a National Council of Churches project, and two of its staff members. There was Ken Lawrence, the Mississippi director for an American Friends Service Committee project on government surveillance that had been one of the inspirations for the suit. There was the A.C.L.U. itself. There were two nonblacks who had been faculty members at Tougaloo—Edwin King, the college chaplain, and John R. Salter, Jr., sometimes known in Jackson as "the mustard man" because of a noted newspaper picture in which he is shown covered with condiments poured on him during a lunch-counter sit-in. It's a picture that brings into focus one of the strongest images I have of those days in the South: black college students, dressed in what they might wear to church on Sunday, are sitting at a lunch counter, staring straight ahead, their backs to the white hoodlums who are tormenting them. Recalled thirty years later, the image seems to have an improbable clarity—as if the production designer of a morality play had gone overboard in distinguishing the good guys from the bad guys.

The suit to open the files of the State Sovereignty Commission has now been going on for eighteen years. The bare outline of its history has something in common, I think, with the history of the civil-rights movement itself—challenging what seems to be a powerful, and even monolithic, institution, persevering despite delay after delay, and breaking up into internal discord by the time the prize seems to be at hand. In this instance, the powerful and monolithic institution presented itself in the form of Federal District Court Judge W. Harold Cox, the most openly racist jurist on the federal bench. Judge Cox's response to the suit strikes me as more or less the equivalent of the policy put together by Southern white politicians in the years just after the Brown v. Board of Education decision of 1954—a policy that went by the name of massive resistance.

Harold Cox was one of the first judges appointed by two politicians whose pictures still occupy a place of honor in the homes of some Mississippi black people—John and Robert Kennedy. His selection was supposed to clear the way for action on other judicial nominees in the Senate Judiciary Committee, then run by Senator James O. Eastland, of Mississippi, a friend of Cox's from the time they were students. As it turned out, many of the Southern judges who were then nominated by the Kennedys and passed on expeditiously by the committee were considered by the civil-rights community to be nearly as hostile as Cox was; Cox, though, was the only one who referred to black people from the bench with words like "niggers" and "chimpanzees." In those days, the federal judges who were the most resolute about dismantling the South's system of legal white supremacy tended to be Republicans appointed by Dwight D. Eisenhower—the old sort of Southern Republicans, whose party affiliation might have signified nothing more ideological than having been born in a hill county that had been unenthusiastic about Secession in the first place. I once wrote that a foreign traveller who knew nothing about the Republican Party except what he gathered from observing federal judges in the South in those days could have easily mistaken it for the party of Lincoln.

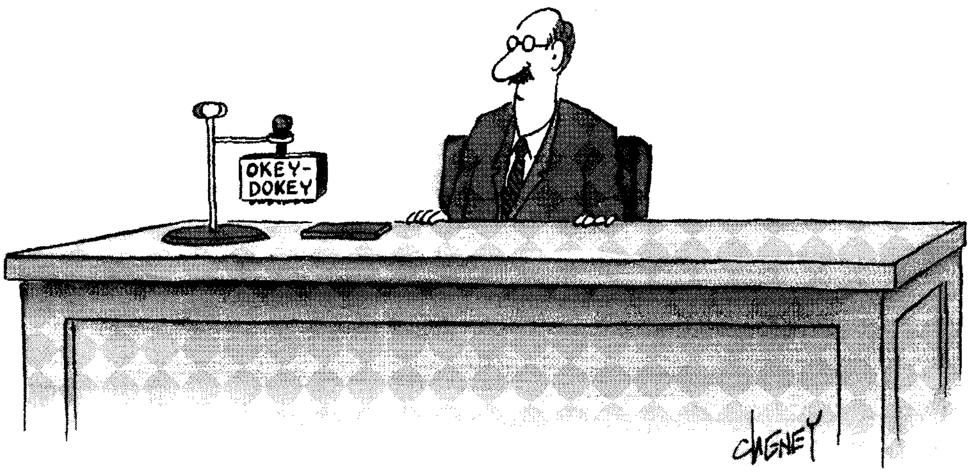
Judge Cox's response to the suit asking for access to the State Sovereignty Commission files was to dismiss it on his own motion. There was a successful appeal to the Fifth Circuit, of course, but in the six years until Cox's retirement little progress was made. In 1984, the judge who inherited the case, William H. Barbour, Jr., granted the plaintiffs the right to discovery, meaning that Ken Lawrence could read every bit of what had survived as the files of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission—eight filing cabinets full of documents, locked in a vault at the state archives. Lawrence, a white radical from Chicago who had spent many years in Mississippi, was peculiarly suited to the task. He had always had an interest in government attempts to spy on and harass the left, and, even before the A.F.S.C. project began, he had accumulated a number of Sovereignty Commission documents. He is, by nature, a collector. He now lives in State College, Pennsylvania, because it is home to the American Philatelic Society; he serves on the society's board and writes a column on United States stamps for its magazine. He owns what he believes to be one of the country's finest collections of Holocaust mail. When he was given access to the Sovereignty Commission files, he assembled photocopies in a twelve-volume plaintiff's exhibit, organized into nearly a hundred categories. Some of the categories were general, such as Spying on Organized Labor and Spying on Elementary School Curricula and Invasion of Personal Privacy and Interference with and Denial of Voting Rights. Some were specific, such as Developing an Informer on Freedom Riders in Prison and Investigating B'nai B'rith and Targeting Michael Schwerner and Targeting Rust College and Spying on an Italian Filmmaker in Natchez.

Judge Barbour decided in favor of the plaintiffs. In 1989, he ruled that the evidence—"generally unrebutted by the defendants"—proved that "the State of Mississippi acted directly through its State Sovereignty Commission and through conspiracy with private individuals to deprive the Plaintiffs of rights protected by the Constitution to free speech and association, to personal privacy, and to lawful search and seizure." He said that opening the files "would further the general principle of informed discussion of the actions of government, while to leave the files closed would perpetuate the attempt of the State to escape accountability." Those referred to in the files would have the opportunity to add corrective information, Judge Barbour ruled, and then the public would have the same access to the documents that it had to other papers in the state archives. At the time of Barbour's decision, the governor and the attorney general were young, reform-minded men who carried no baggage from the sixties; the attorney general announced that the State of Mississippi would not appeal.

That would have been that, except that by the time Judge Barbour handed down his decision a split among the plaintiffs had divided them into two subclasses, which the Judge called the access class and the privacy class. The access class, which represented those who wanted the public to have virtually unrestricted access to the files, included the A.C.L.U. itself and almost everyone else on the plaintiff side. The privacy class consisted of John Salter and Ed King, the two former Tougaloo faculty members. Their view was that unlimited access would be a way of recirculating the Commission's dirt—compounding the damage that the spying and smearing had done to innocent people in the first place. The privacy class appealed Barbour's ruling, and the Fifth Circuit directed Barbour to construct a plan that would protect privacy. The plan that Judge Barbour came up with included mechanisms by which victims of the State Sovereignty Commission—but not informers or people who had been acting for the state—would be given an opportunity to ask that their names be blocked out. Salter, who is now retired in North Dakota, dropped out of the case, but King, maintaining that the plan would not go far enough in protecting the privacy of innocent parties, appealed to the Fifth Circuit again. Because of that appeal, the case continues, and so does the disagreement between Ed King and the rest of the plaintiffs about just how much of the secret past needs to be uncovered.

"I DON'T think I'm either insane or a traitor," Ed King said within a few seconds of our meeting. He is aware that people say that he must have something to fear from public access to the files, or that he can't bear to see the case end because he is still living in the sixties, or that he has simply gone over the edge. Ken Lawrence, who believes that opening the files is "a weapon of the struggle," makes no bones about considering King the enemy. "People assume that I couldn't be carrying on this fight on principle," King told me. "I must be covering something up." But among those who disagree with him there are some people who do believe that he is carrying on the fight on principle—that he is, in the words of one of them, "pure of heart." Even those people, though, are tired of looking at documents about the case that King has annotated. Even those people tend to respond to the mention of Ed King's name with a sigh and a rolling of the eyes. King is aware of that, too.

King's bitterest critics would not deny that he was an authentic hero of the civil-rights struggle. At a time when few white Mississippians would have publicly supported even the theoretical right of black people to demonstrate, he was active in the sit-in movement. He was the only white candidate on the slate of a statewide mock election carried on in November of 1963—an election that turned out to be the precursor of the Mississippi Summer Project. In those days, I was always curious about what might cause a white person in a place like Mississippi to abandon the views on race he had grown up with and openly join the movement that his family and friends and neighbors so despised. King tends to credit his apostasy to the Methodists—an indication that the subversion hunters of the Citizens Council might have been, in their own special way, on the right track. Growing up in a conventionally segregationist family in Vicksburg, King went to Millsaps, a liberal-arts college in Jackson connected to the Methodist Church. The very fact that the Methodists had healed their Civil War split—unlike, say, the American Baptists and the Southern Baptists—meant that, even in Mississippi, Methodists were exposed to a national-church

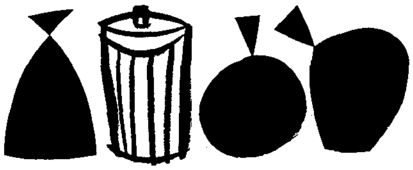


point of view on race. King, who was heading toward divinity school, says he found that view persuasive. On the other hand, among the Paul Johnson papers at U.S.M. I came across the report of a surprise visit to King's mother made by the State Sovereignty Commission director, who concluded from the conversation that one of two Millsaps sociology professors named in the report must have been the prime influence in transforming Ed King into a race mixer.

In "Local People," a study of the civil-rights struggle in Mississippi, which recently won the Bancroft Prize, the historian John Dittmer wrote that King became "the most visible white activist in the Mississippi movement, and he paid a heavy price for honoring his convictions. King was ostracized by his family, scorned by his colleagues in the clergy, and later shunned by the 'New South' white moderates who entered the political arena only after it was safe to do so." He still bears the scars of a dreadful car wreck that occurred at the height of the Jackson demonstrations. At one point, he went through an acrimonious divorce. He now works for the University of Mississippi Medical Center, in Jackson, teaching sociology to people who are studying to be physical therapists and medical technicians. Those who feel kindly toward him tend to say, even if they are about to say that he is insane or is living in the past, that he is one of the many people who might have been damaged in the movement.

To me, Ed King didn't sound insane—just highly focussed. He says that, far from having changed his mind about access as it became clear what was in the files, he had simply assumed from the start that the names of innocent parties would be blocked out, as they are in F.B.I. files obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. He has any number of specific problems with the privacy protections proposed by Judge Barbour. He thinks, for instance, that insufficient distinction is made between "the dirty spies who each week turned in their neighbors" and someone who might have made a remark at a party which found its way into a report after some phrase like "Information was received from . . ." He says that notification in newspaper advertisements about how to arrange to have your name blocked out would mean nothing to people who have no reason to think that their names would be in such files in the first place. What if, he says, a report on a black minister who allowed COFO to use his church for mass meetings in 1964 includes the allegation that he dipped into church funds and had affairs with certain women in the congregation? Why would those women, who may have had nothing at all to do with the civil-rights movement, think that their names might be in the files of the State Sovereignty Commission? How would a veteran of the movement who might think it amusing to have been called a Communist by the Sovereignty Commission know that he was also called a drug addict or an adulterer? What about those whose request to have their names blocked out is denied on the ground that they were informers or state agents? Should they have to hire a lawyer just to protect their privacy? King and his former allies have talked about these points for hours—for instance, they have discussed one formula or another for defining an informer by, say, number of contacts or whether payment was received—but he says he will not be satisfied unless it is agreed to block out the name of everyone who could be in any way considered a victim or a bystander rather than an oppressor. He often repeats the simplest formulation of his viewpoint: "We need to know what the government did, but not to whom."

Whatever dangers unrestricted access would bring are, of course, already present in the several years' worth of Sovereignty Commission documents accessible to anyone willing to go to the McCain Library at the University of Southern Mississippi and ask for the Paul Johnson papers. If the ready availability of the Johnson collection since 1989 has caused any instances of divorce or mortification or blackmail, they have not become public knowledge. What I saw in the Johnson documents seemed to confirm what I'd heard from people familiar with the files as a whole: there is relatively little material that people would find personally embarrassing or damaging, particularly thirty years after the fact. One report from someone who spied for the Commission during the summer of 1964 says that the students occupying what the civil-rights volunteers called Freedom Houses were especially careful not to engage in any behavior that would give the police an excuse to arrest them. In King's view, though, "if only a dozen people are affected, they have their rights."

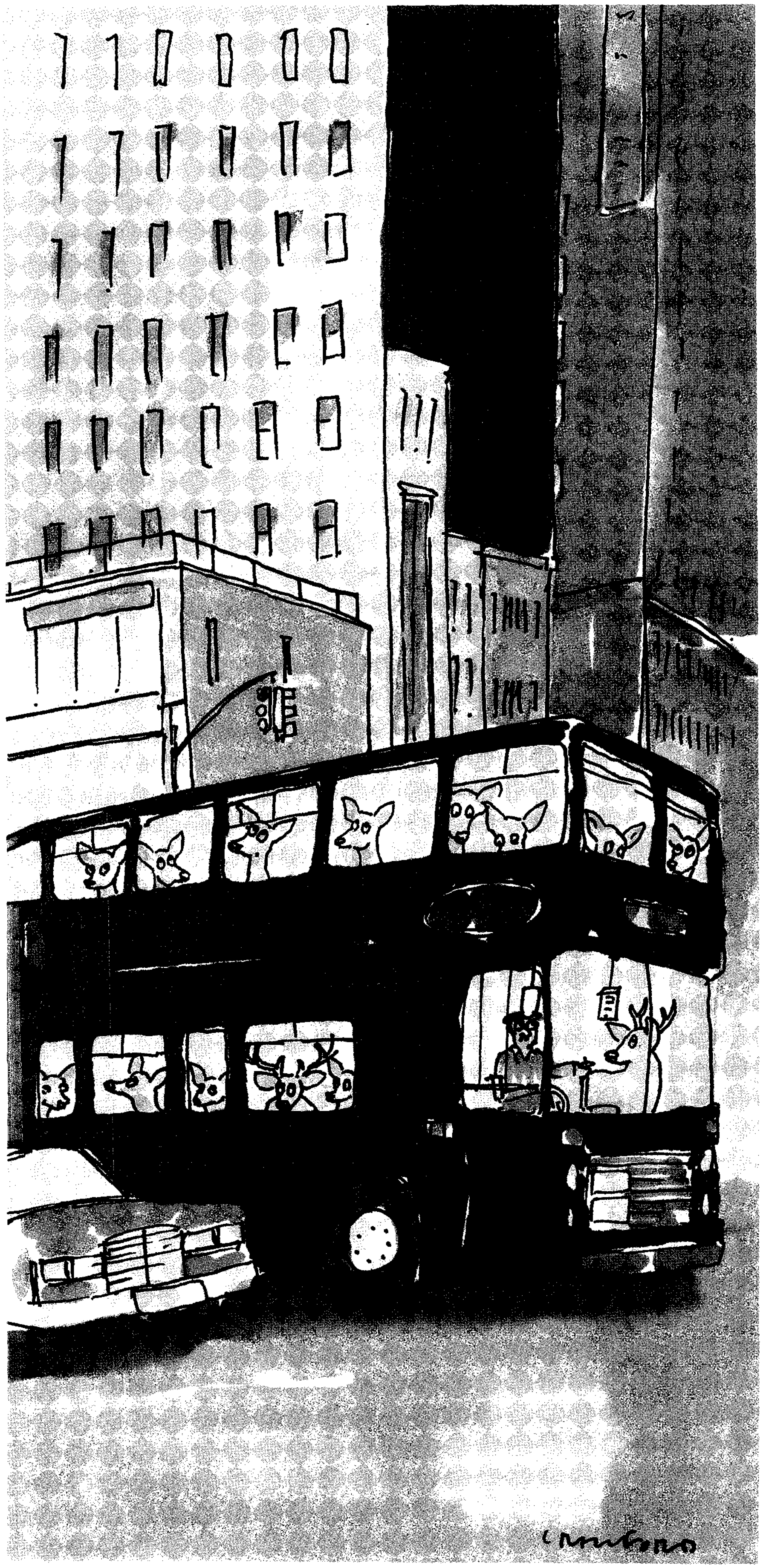


I did feel uneasy about reading a few of the documents I saw in the McCain Library—a report that mentioned the treatment of one jailed demonstrator for a social disease, for instance, and a medical report that seemed to be a psychiatric workup of a young man admitted to the state mental hospital. On the other hand, I felt exhilarated by another document. It was the report of a spy in the COFO office which mentioned someone I knew—a woman who had come to the South even before 1964 to work with the Student Nonviolent Coördinating Committee. The spy, who was identified on his reports as "Operator #79," wrote, "The 'strong' females on the permanent office staff have told me earlier of a revolution among females, 'the women's fight for equality with men.' To the students, this is a deeply serious matter. I have watched it gain momentum over the past months. There are many male supporters of this new 'thing.' " My acquaintance was named as one of the new thing's ringleaders. I sent her a copy of the report. I figure that if she ever gets into a dispute with other feminists about who does and who doesn't have bona fides in the movement, the report that Operator No. 79 filed in July of 1964 will trump anything in the room.

THE largest chunk of Commission documents to have surfaced during the litigation over access to the files was put into circulation by Erle Johnston, who happens to be the only surviving director of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission. In 1989, Johnston borrowed part of Ken Lawrence's plaintiff's exhibit from an unsuspecting legal secretary and headed straight for the copying store. Liberator of the files is an unusual role for a former director of the Sovereignty Commission to play—it might be assumed that the people who actually worked for the Commission would have a strong interest in keeping everything locked tightly in the basement of the state archives—but Johnston was an unusual Sovereignty Commission director. Although he succeeded a former sheriff and preceded a former F.B.I. man, he himself was a former editor and publisher of the Scott County *Times*, in Forest, Mississippi. I had last run into him in the office of Governor Ross Barnett in 1961, the day I got my Jackson police badge; he was then the Sovereignty Commission's public-relations director. I've always had vivid memories of that occasion because Governor Barnett, who was known for grandiloquent speech, said to me—in as gracious a way as he could manage, since all Mississippi officials were trying hard to be polite—that something *Time* had said about him a few years before was "a malicious, pusillanimous, herbivorous lie." Johnston was amiable then, and he remains amiable. He has always been a man who tries to get along. A book he wrote on the period, "Mississippi's Defiant Years: 1953-1973," includes testimonials from both William F. Winter, a relatively liberal governor in the early eighties, and William J. Simmons, the longtime administrator of the Citizens Council. It also contains a tribute to Aaron Henry and Charles Evers, "the two most visible and aggressive black civil-rights leaders in Mississippi during the 'defiant years' "—sort of in the spirit of a trial lawyer lifting a glass to his adversary after a particularly rancorous day in court.

Johnston maintains that he has nothing to fear from public access to the files, since they would portray him as a "practical segregationist" rather than an authentic hater. More or less retired at seventy-seven, he likes to talk about having hired black people when he was mayor of Forest and making speeches as Sovereignty Commission director that enraged the Citizens Council, but he seems half resigned to being considered a villain. "I'm the only one left," he told me when I stopped by Forest to see him. "I'm the one they can point the finger at and say, 'There goes that monster.' " Anyone who wanted to defend or condemn Johnston's behavior at the Sovereignty Commission could find plenty of supporting material for either in the papers of Paul Johnson. This was in a period when thugs were beginning to crawl out of the cracks that had been made in Mississippi's confident defense, and there are reports in the U.S.M. papers showing that the Sovereignty Commission under Johnston's leadership quietly settled some confron-

SUBURBAN SIGHTSEERS



tations before the dynamite-and-shotgun crowd could take over. There are papers reflecting the attempt of the Citizens Council and its even kookier cousin, Americans for the Preservation of the White Race, to get Johnston fired for suspicion of moderation. On the other hand, the U.S.M. files also show that it was Erle Johnston who wrote the University of Mississippi trustees trying to get James Silver fired and Erle Johnston, on a similar errand at Rust College, who sent the trustees a report smearing their president as "a known liar and ladies' man." The memo instructing McCain on how to blackmail an applicant to the University of Southern Mississippi into withdrawing his application was also signed by Erle Johnston.

It isn't likely that the files under court seal hold documents that would drastically affect the reputation of Erle Johnston, and what is true of him is thought to be true of most people who were well known in what he calls the defiant years. Nobody I talked to in Mississippi believes that what remains secret includes many more front-page stories. Judge Barbour has estimated that three-quarters of the papers locked away at the state archives have already been seen in one way or another. Also, it is taken for granted that some of the more explosive material gathered by the State Sovereignty Commission was long ago weeded out. Most of the segregationist politicians of that era are out of politics by now, or dead. The paucity of dramatic stories about prominent black people who were discovered to have been spies is such that one man who seems to have been an operative known as Agent X, a congressional aide named R. L. Bolden, has been exposed in the media again and again—most recently last January by "Dateline NBC," in the tone of voice that might have been used if a reporter for a TV news-magazine show had beat Stanley to Livingstone.

Among those familiar with the material, there is general agreement that a lot of what's in the files amounts to newspaper clippings and turgid essays ("Comments on 'Yesterday's Constitution Today,' a Textbook Taught at the University of Mississippi") and spying reports so mundane that they have the sound of the "Social Notes" column in a county weekly. ("Bill Kopic, mentioned in previous reports, returned to Jackson the week of December 13," wrote a spy placed as a secretary in the offices of some civil-rights lawyers. "You will recall that he went to New York to take his bar examination again. He does not know whether or not he passed this time. Henry Aronson was out of town during the Holidays. He was in New York and Seattle during this time.")

Also, the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, like any other government agency, generated a lot of paper that had more to do with justifying next year's appropriation than with completing the job at hand. There are pages in the files, for instance, concerning Erle Johnston's efforts to bring about the firing of A. D. Beittel, a Tougaloo president who had been openly supportive of civil-rights demonstrations; a week after Johnston flew to New York to put his case before Tougaloo trustees, it was announced that Beittel's contract would not be renewed. But John Dittmer, who has studied the incident in some detail, is convinced that Johnston, finding out from a spy at Tougaloo that Beittel was going to be forced out, staged the campaign so that the State Sovereignty Commission could take credit—a theory that Erle Johnston has been only too happy to embrace. ("I was always looking for something I could do to satisfy the white power structure without doing something terrible.")

At times, the State Sovereignty Commission was indeed capable of forcing people from their jobs, but its predilection for sending large men to examine tiny fingernails can make it seem more ludicrous than ominous. A phrase that keeps popping up in current descriptions of its activities is "Keystone Cops." A passage in a 1964 report reflects the level of sophistication the Commission sometimes demonstrated in the area of Cold War skulduggery: "In order to receive regularly publications of communist front organizations and preferring that the Sovereignty Commission not be on their mailing lists, we made arrangement with John Kochtitzky, Jr., to be the subscriber and deliver the publications to our office each week. We wanted a name which sounded 'Russianish.' " In 1964, when the Commission began dealing with the Mississippi Summer Project volunteers, many of them students from first-rank Northern universities, reports from investigators and spies began to include sentences like "The Kirschenbaum boy said that he did not believe in Jesus Christ."

Of course, what sound like Keystone Cops antics now were probably not funny at all thirty years ago—certainly not to the Kirschenbaum boy if he was being questioned at the side of a lonely country road around dusk by armed officials of the State of Mississippi who wanted to know exactly what he had against the Saviour. In those days, being called a Communist was also considerably less amusing than it might be now. It's difficult for anyone sitting in the McCain Library in 1995, several years after the end of the Cold War, to take seriously references to the role of the Red Menace in the events of 1964, when black Americans in Mississippi were routinely denied even the elementary American right to vote and a number of people went to the state with the goal of helping to remedy that situation. But Communism was serious business at the time. A Mississippi politician who was asked why black people were not allowed to vote in his state might answer that certain people involved in the voter-registration campaign had once been to a meeting of an organization cited by the House Un-American Activities Committee as a Communist front. Case closed.

The civil-rights movement itself was seriously split over the question of whether accepting the assistance of organizations that could easily be attacked as subversive was counterproductive, or perhaps even immoral. Association with such organizations could mean the loss of funding in the North, because the concern—some would say obsession—with Communism was national. It was the federal government, in the form of the attorney general's office and congressional committees, that gathered lists of subversive organizations. In one of the clippings I ran across in Mississippi, Erle Johnston is quoted as saying that the State Sovereignty Commission "operated like a state-level F.B.I." That characterization seemed grandiose, given the Sovereignty Commission's penchant for bloodline inspections, but then I started thinking about what the F.B.I. was up to at that time—bugging motel rooms in order to embarrass or blackmail Martin Luther King, Jr., gathering information on law-abiding citizens right down to the names of people they had spoken to at the high-school reunion or the Hadassah dinner dance. Mississippi was not the only state government to keep secret files on its residents. "The Police Threat to Political Liberty," the report that came out of the American Friends Service Committee project on surveillance, has chapters not just on Jackson but also on Seattle and Baltimore and Los Angeles and Philadelphia.

In a way, the code phrases Mississippi used—"state sovereignty" for its system of white supremacy, "federal encroachment" for the national pressure to change—offered an accurate reflection of the situation. The Mississippi way of life was always vulnerable to contact with national institutions—the Methodist Church or the United States Air Force or the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. For many years, though, the pressure from Washington was not much more than nominal. Federal civil-rights legislation was bottled up by a powerful bloc of Southern senators. The Presidents in office in the decade after the Brown decision, when Mississippi was doing its best to run what James Silver called the Closed Society, did not treat the restoration of civil rights to black people in the South as a national priority. Dwight D. Eisenhower was identified with the view that you can't legislate morality. John F. Kennedy seemed to consider segregation a deplorable but essentially unalterable regional situation that was inconvenient mainly because it caused embarrassment overseas. Even Northern politicians who were particularly critical of Mississippi's single-race elections would not challenge their legitimacy, as Ed King and other delegates of the Freedom Democratic Party found out at the Democratic National Convention of 1964 when they tried to get seated in place of the all-white delegation from Mississippi. Reading through State Sovereignty Commission documents did not change my view that Mississippi had been sui generis, but it did remind me that the Closed Society had existed quite comfortably for years within the society of the United States of America. When I was in Mississippi in those days, I may have had thoughts of slipping over the border, but I was in my own country the entire time.

"Very classy choice for a guy who's eating solo."

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Of the hundreds of white people who went to Mississippi in the summer of 1964, committed to working for the benefit of black people, one is still at it. His name is Rims Barber, and he is one of the named plaintiffs in the suit to open the files of the State Sovereignty Commission. A Presbyterian minister from Chicago, Barber worked for the Delta Ministry for a dozen years and the Children's Defense Fund for another dozen. For the past four or five years, he has been lobbying the Mississippi Legislature as a one-man organization called the Mississippi Human Services Agenda. He works out of a ramshackle house a couple of blocks from the capitol, sharing quarters with other lingering troublemakers, like the Environmental Justice Project and Congregations for Children—the Methodists, again. One room of the old house is supposed to be the office of the Mississippi Human Services Agenda, but Barber seems to have migrated to one corner of a large conference table in what was once a living room—a room whose walls have posters like one showing a smiling little girl above the legend "The Arms Race May Kill Her. So Might Poverty. Help Fight Both." When I walked in, he waved an arm at the disorder around him and said, "Welcome to the Freedom House of the nineties." It did look like a Freedom House during what civil-rights workers sometimes called Freedom Summer and Erle Johnston, out of an old habit, still refers to as the Invasion. Sitting there in a rickety folding chair next to the messy conference table, I felt for a moment that we were back in 1964, when Jackson seemed full of the eager students referred to by one white woman I met as "those COFO things."

"Why are you still here?" I asked.

"Ignorance and stubbornness," Barber said.

Rims Barber believes that the State Sovereignty Commission files should be opened under the privacy guidelines constructed by Judge Barbour. He thinks that most of the dirt in the files was spread when it was acquired, and that the rest wouldn't make much difference at this point anyway. "I know there are lies in there," he said. "So what? You can tell that they're lies. And they're thirty years old. I have seen some of the lies in there—one that says we paid people to register to vote. If you smudged that over, you wouldn't know what kind of lies they were telling, and if you smudged my name out there'd be no way the lie could be checked. Also, it reflects the thinking of these people. They *believed* that. It's important to know what they thought. And without names it isn't real."

Barber first worked in the capitol in 1968, as an administrative assistant to the state's first black legislator since Reconstruction, and even then he was irritated by hints that legislators he dealt with every day might have seen Sovereignty Commission documents about him that he had never seen himself. There are now forty-two black legislators, and they form the core around which Barber tries to build coalitions on issues having to do with poverty and welfare and crime and education. Republicans dominate Mississippi politics now, and they are not the sort of Republicans that Dwight D. Eisenhower might have appointed to the federal bench. They are modern right-wing Republicans who talk about smaller government and personal responsibility and how idyllic everything was in the fifties—a period, Barber is quick to point out, in which women were in the kitchen and black people were in the back of the bus. These days, of course, there are a lot of people in Washington as well as in Mississippi talking about the evils of federal encroachment on areas of life that should be the province of the states. People around the country who refer to federal agents as "jackbooted thugs" speak of the Tenth Amendment with as much fervor as Ross Barnett and the Citizens Council once did. If all of them were united in a national umbrella organization, State Sovereignty Commission wouldn't be a bad name.

In that sense, I suppose you could say that Mississippi is now more like the rest of the country—or that the rest of the country is more like Mississippi—but not in ways that please Rims Barber. While I was in Jackson, the legislature was dealing with a measure to introduce caning into prisons and a measure to privatize certain areas of welfare. "Nobody says 'nigger' anymore," Barber says. "It's usually in code words." But he sees the issues he deals with now as simply extensions of what was being fought over in 1964. In fact, he sometimes says, "The gains we made are hanging by a thread, and they want to cut the thread." If you're talking to Rims Barber in what he calls the Freedom House of the nineties, the documents in the State Sovereignty Commission files don't seem to be about a peculiar and encapsulated era in American history.

Before I left the house, I asked Barber if he had expected the lawsuit to open the files to take this long.

"No," he said. "But then I didn't expect the civil-rights movement to take this long, either." ♦

A NIGHT ON THE TOWN

SERIOUS STYLE

The fashion world found the best excuse for a buying binge and blowout at the return of the Seventh on Sale benefit to help fight AIDS.

BY HILTON ALS

If Hollywood were to envision a contemporary film that could convey the aura surrounding recent events sponsored by the Council of Fashion Designers of America and *Vogue*, it might look something like Ridley Scott's "Blade Runner." The film is not simply an evocation of the fashion-conscious, image-laden future we like to imagine but a quasi documentary on the way the fashionable world is in the present: an embarrassment of epochs and ethnicities and sexual differences converging at a point of delicious commonality.

On the opening night of the event known as Seventh on Sale/The Return to New York, shoppers at the old Sixty-ninth Regiment Armory, on Twenty-sixth Street, found close to a hundred designer booths, stocked with nearly five and a half million dollars' worth of clothing, accessories, and other merchandise, to be sold mostly at wholesale prices or below. The proceeds from the sale will be distributed through the C.F.D.A.–Vogue Initiative/New York City AIDS Fund and a national AIDS fund, and will be targeted for AIDS-education and AIDS-prevention programs. The first Seventh on Sale, in 1990, mobilized the fashion industry in the fight against AIDS and raised four million two hundred thousand dollars; the C.F.D.A. is also a sponsor of the Seventh on Sixth fashion shows held in Bryant Park each spring and fall.

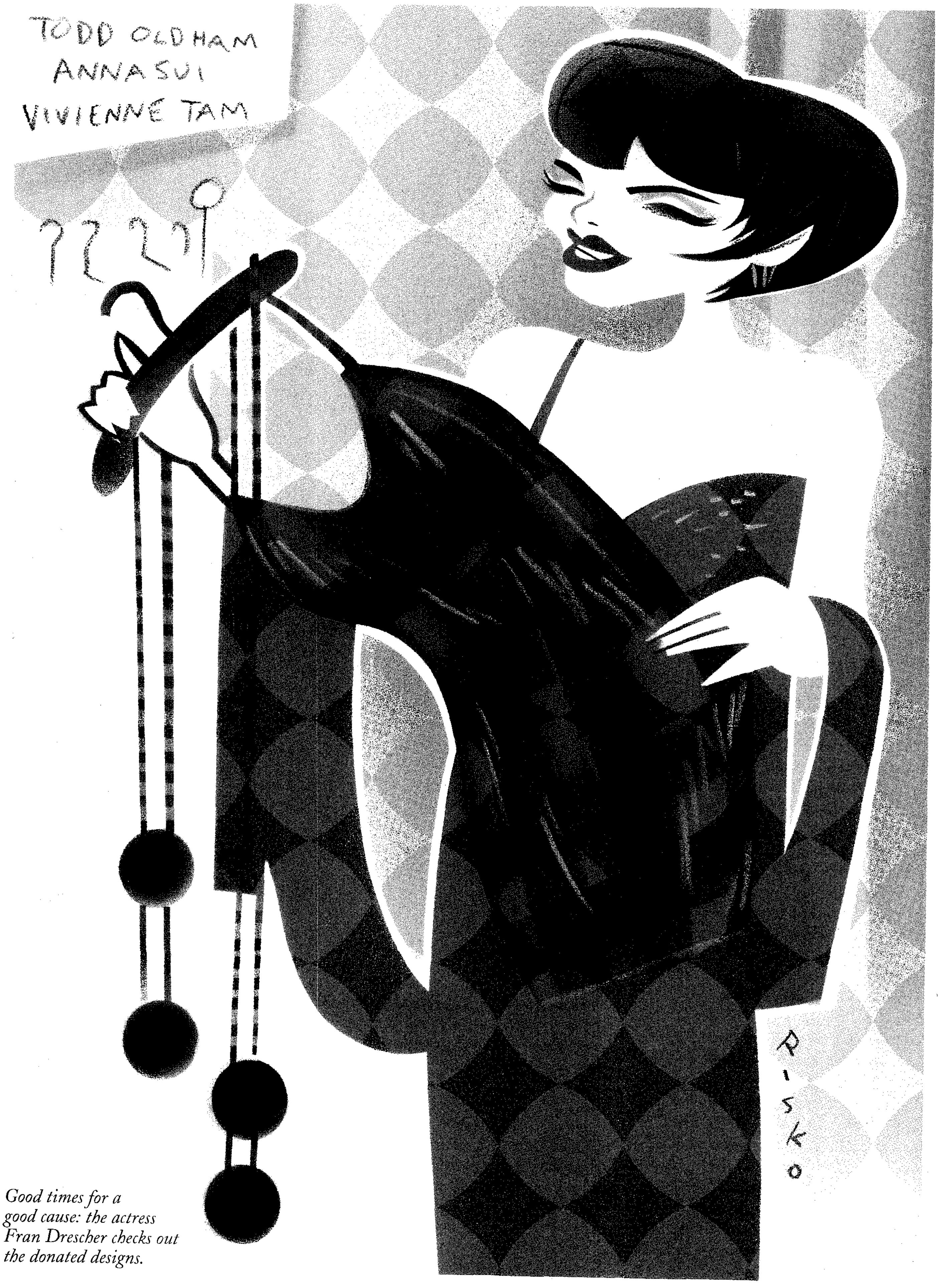
On the Armory floor, booths featuring the work of designers as varied as Donna Karan, Ralph Lauren, Isaac Mizrahi, Todd Oldham, Anna Sui, and Bill Blass projected their philanthropic energy toward the concerned and glamorous throng, some of whom declared themselves "anti-fashion." "You don't need clothes," Calvin Klein said to Jeanne Beker, the host of VH1 Fashion TV. "All you need is to be able to touch the material." The popular gossip columnist George Wayne announced to a reporter, "I love glamour, I love excitement, I love theatre, and this event combines all the elements. It's theatre, darling."

Afloat in a cloud of white organza, Donna Karan, who is one of the designers most closely associated with the C.F.D.A., granted interviews in between blowing air kisses and declaring, "Photos and art and fashion are what New York has always been about. We're just here to make it happen." While Karan was greeting, among others, the silver-haired Gianni Versace, a neatly coiffed André Leon Talley, the lacquer-haired Linda Evangelista, and a newly shorn Naomi Campbell, the Donna Karan boutique ran out of everything in black.

One of the more salient features of Seventh on Sale/The Return was the unabashed enthusiasm of the star-spotting that went on among industry folk. The most ardent admirers of models, designers, and fashion editors are, not surprisingly, models, designers, and fashion editors. Claudia Schiffer, in a black sleeveless Chanel dress with a white fake gardenia at belly-button height, asked a reporter, before being whisked away into the dining area, "Is Naomi here? I would like to find a miniskirt and, you know, a bracelet? Have you seen Linda?"

The dinner tables, with terra-cotta pots of assorted peonies and lilacs as centerpieces, were enclosed by four white scrims reaching from floor to ceiling. Candle flames flickered, illuminating the faces of the celebrated and the uncelebrated alike. Among the

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROBERT RISKO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RISKO

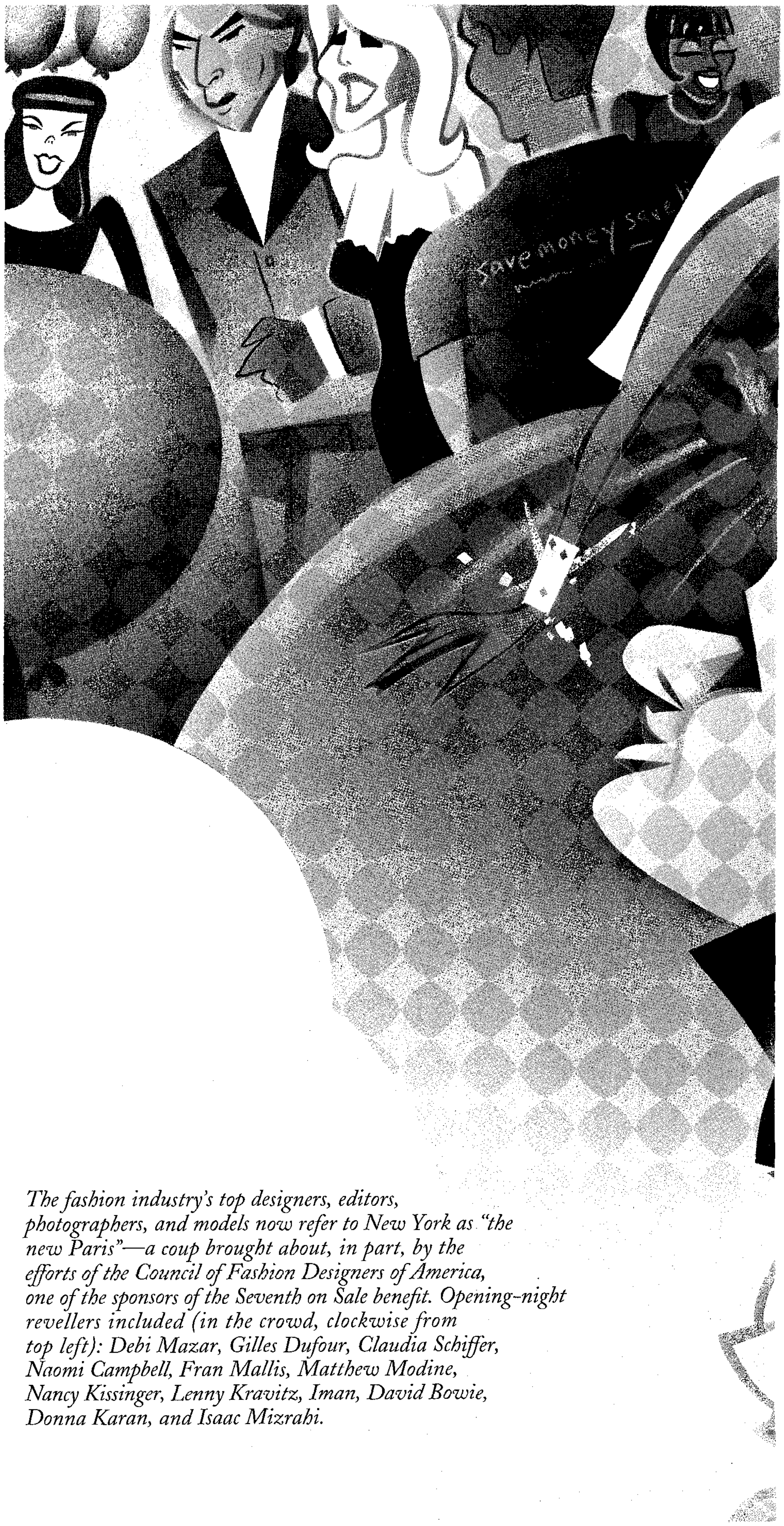
Good times for a good cause: the actress Fran Drescher checks out the donated designs.

former were the editor-in-chief of *Vogue*, Anna Wintour; the photographer Herb Ritts; and the actress Debi Mazar, best known for her distinctive New York accent and her former association with Madonna. She has pale-blue eyes, set off by a helmet of fine black hair, pale skin, and red lips. She said, "I've lost so many friends because of this epidemic." She paused, and her eyes clouded over. "Fifteen years it's been going on. You do what you can do." But Mazar brightened considerably when the actress and comedian Rosie O'Donnell, the evening's boisterous auctioneer, approached the podium. "Rosie cracks me up," Mazar said.

O'Donnell, wearing salmon-colored evening pajamas, was less than impressed by the bids she received for certain non-P.C. items on offer. "A fur coat?" Martha Nelson, the managing editor of the new Time Inc. magazine *In Style*, remarked to her companion. "It won't sell. This is New York." But O'Donnell, schooled in the trenches of higher purpose, barrelled on, saying, "It is my job to have you spend money. This is not the place where you get value. This is the place where your friends get up and applaud your generosity." Then, in relatively quick succession, O'Donnell sold seven loose diamonds, for fifteen thousand dollars, to the rock legend David Bowie (a very belated wedding present for his bride of three years, the ex-model and cosmetics magnate Iman), and a Cadillac, to the American singer Melissa Etheridge (whose presence brought into relief the number of Europeans who have come to believe that New York is one of the prime centers of fashion as business).

"It's remarkable how quickly all this has taken off, and how important the shows have become in Bryant Park," the currently corn-rowed British designer John Galliano remarked. "And it's remarkable how New York has responded to the AIDS crisis."

Cone-shaped planters floated above the tables like satellites of hope and despair. After dinner, a number of people took to the dance floor, among them Rosie Perez, who, being colored and female, brash and vulnerable, is emblematic of the new New York. In her gold-trimmed white halter dress by Dolce & Gabbana, Perez, ignoring the exigencies of time and loss, danced to one song with particular abandon: the disco classic "I Will Survive." ♦



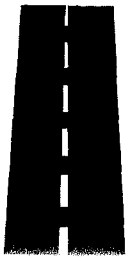
The fashion industry's top designers, editors, photographers, and models now refer to New York as "the new Paris"—a coup brought about, in part, by the efforts of the Council of Fashion Designers of America, one of the sponsors of the Seventh on Sale benefit. Opening-night revellers included (in the crowd, clockwise from top left): Debi Mazar, Gilles Dufour, Claudia Schiffer, Naomi Campbell, Fran Mallis, Matthew Modine, Nancy Kissinger, Lenny Kravitz, Iman, David Bowie, Donna Karan, and Isaac Mizrahi.

RISKO

FICTION

DEEP RIVER

BY RICHARD FORD



IN these summery days my life, at least frontally, is simplicity's model. I live happily if slightly bemusedly in a forty-four-year-old bachelor's way in my former wife's house at 116 Cleveland, in the Presidents Streets section of Haddam, New Jersey, where I'm employed as a Realtor Associate by the Lauren-Schwindell firm, on Seminary Street. I should say, perhaps, the house formerly owned by formerly my wife, Ann Dykstra, now Mrs. Charley O'Dell, of 86 Swallow Lane, Deep River, Connecticut. Both my children live there, too, though I'm not certain how happy they are or even should be.

The configuration of life events that led me to this profession and to this very house could, I suppose, seem unusual if your model for human continuance is some "Middletown" white paper from early in the century and geared to Indiana, or an "ideal American family life" profile as promoted by some right-wing think tank—several of whose directors live here in Haddam—but that is just propaganda for a mode of life no one could live without access to the very impulse-suppressing, nostalgia-provoking drugs they don't want you to have (though I'm sure *they* have them by the tractor-trailer loads). But to anyone reasonable, my life will seem more or less normal-under-the-microscope, full of contingencies and incongruities none of us escape and which do little harm in an existence that otherwise goes unnoticed.

This morning I'm setting off on a weekend trip with my only son, Paul Bascombe, which promises, unlike most of my seekings, to be starred by weighty life events. There is, in fact, an odd feeling of *lasts* to this excursion, as if some signal period in life—mine *and* his—is coming, if not to a full close, then at least toward some tightening, transforming twist in the kaleidoscope, a change I'd be foolish to take lightly, and don't.

Two and a half months ago, just after tax time and six weeks before the school year ended in Deep River, Paul, who is fifteen, was arrested for shoplifting three boxes of Fourex condoms ("Magnums") from a display-dispenser in the Finast down in Essex. His acts were surveilled by an "eye in the sky" camera hidden above the male-hygiene products. And when a tiny, uniformed Vietnamese security person (a female) approached him just beyond the checkout, where, as a diversionary tactic, he'd bought a bottle of Grecian Formula, he bolted but was wrestled to the ground whereupon he screamed that the woman was "a God-damned spick asshole," kicked her in the thigh, hit her in the mouth (conceivably by accident) and pulled out a fair amount of her hair before she could apply a police stranglehold and, with the help of a pharmacist and another customer, get the cuffs on him. (His mother had him out in an hour.) The security guard naturally enough, since it's 1988, has pressed criminal charges of assault and battery, as well as for the violation of some of her civil rights, and there have even been "hate crime" and "making an example" rumblings out of the Essex juvenile authorities.

Meanwhile, Paul has been through myriad pretrial interviews, plus hours of tangled psychological evaluations of his personality, attitudes, and mental state—two of which sessions I attended, and found unremarkable but fair, though I have not yet seen the results. For these proceedings he has not had a lawyer but an "ombudsman," who's a social worker trained in legal matters, and whom his mother has talked to but I haven't. His first court date is to be this Tuesday morning, the day after the Fourth of July.

Paul for his part had admitted everything yet has told me he feels not very guilty, that the woman rushed him from behind and scared the shit out of him so that he thought he might be being murdered and needed to defend himself; that he shouldn't have said what he said, that it was a mistake, but he's promised he has nothing against any other races or genders and in fact feels "betrayed" himself—by what, he hasn't said. He's claimed to have had no specific use in mind for the condoms (a relief if true) and probably would've only used them in a practical joke against architect O'Dell, his mother's husband, whom he, along with his father, dislikes.

For a brief time I thought of taking a leave of absence from the realty office, subletting a condo somewhere down the road from Deep River, and keeping in touch with Paul on a daily basis. But his mother disapproved. She didn't want me around, and said so. She also believed that unless things got worse, life should remain as "normal" as possible until his hearing. She and I have continued to talk it over every bit—Haddam to Deep River—and she is of the belief that all this will pass, that he is simply going through a phase and doesn't, in fact, have a syndrome or a mania, as someone might think. (It is her Michigan stoicism that allows her to equate endurance with progress.) But as a result, I've seen less of him than I'd like in the last two months, though I have now proposed bringing him down to Haddam to live with me in the fall, which Ann has so far been leery of.

She has, however—because she isn't crazy—hauled him to New Haven to be "privately evaluated" by a fancy shrink, an experience Paul claims he enjoyed and lied through like a pirate. Ann even went so far as to send him for twelve days in mid-May to an expensive health camp in the Berkshires, Camp Wanapi (called "Camp Unhappy" by the inmates), where he was judged to be "too inactive" and for some reason encouraged to wear mime makeup and spend part of every day sitting in an invisible chair with an invisible pane of glass in front of him, smiling and looking surprised and grimacing at passersby. (This was, of course, also videotaped.) The camp counsellors, who were all secretly "milieu therapists" in mufti—loose white T-shirts, baggy khaki shorts, muscle-bound calves, dog whistles, lanyards, clipboards, preternaturally geared up for unstructured heart-to-hearts—expressed the opinion that Paul was intellectually beyond his years (language and

FILIP PAGOWSKI

reasoning skills off the Stanford charts) but was emotionally underdeveloped (closer to age twelve), which in their view posed "a problem." So that even though he acts and talks like a shrewd sophomore in the honors program at Beloit, full of sly jokes and double entendres—he has also recently shot up to five feet eight inches, with a new layer of quaky pudge all over—his feelings still get hurt in the manner of a child who knows much less about the world than a Girl Scout.

Since Camp Unhappy, he has also begun exhibiting an unusual number of unusual symptoms: he has complained about an inability to yawn and sneeze properly; he has remarked about a mysterious "tingling" at the end of his penis; he has complained about not liking how his teeth "line up." And he has from time to time made unexpected barking noises—leering like a Cheshire, afterwards—and for several days made soft but audible *eeeck-eeecking* sounds by drawing breath back down his throat with his mouth closed, usually with a look of dismay on his face. His mother has tried to talk to him about this, has re-consulted the shrink (who's advised many more sessions), and has even got Charley O'Dell to "step in." Paul at first claimed he couldn't imagine what anybody was talking about, that all seemed normal to him, then later he said that making odd noises satisfied a legitimate inner urge and didn't bother others, and that everyone should get over their problems with it, and him.

In these charged months I have tried, in essence, to increase my own ombudsman's involvement, conducting early-morning phone conversations with him and taking him and now and then his sister, Clarissa, on even more intense than usual driving excursions, fishing trips, canoe rides, and battlefield visits. Once, we ventured to Atlantic City on a boys-only junket to see Mel Tormé at TropWorld, and twice we've gone to the Jersey Shore, there to be idle-hours bums, swimming in the ocean when syringes and solid human waste weren't competing for room, walking the beach and talking over affairs of the world and himself in a nondirected way until long after dark.

In these talks, Paul has revealed much: most notably, that he's waging a complex but losing struggle to forget certain things. He remembers, for instance, a dog we had years ago when we were all a nuclear family together in Haddam, a sweet, wiggly old basset hound named Mr. Toby, who none of us could love enough and all doted on like candy, but who got flattened late one summer afternoon right in front of our house during a family cookout. Poor Mr. Toby actually clambered up off the Hoving Road pavement and in a dying dash galumphed straight to Paul and leaped into his arms before shuddering, wailing once, and croaking. Paul has told me in these last weeks that even then (at only age six) he was afraid the incident would stay in his mind, possibly even for the rest of his life—and ruin it. For weeks and weeks, he said, he lay awake in his room thinking about Mr. Toby and worrying about the fact that he was thinking about him. Eventually, the memory had gone away, until just after the Finast rubbers incident, when it came back, and now he thinks about Mr. Toby "a lot" (possibly constantly), thinks that Mr. Toby should be alive still and we should have him—and by extension, of course, that his poor brother, Ralph, who died of Reye's, should also be alive (as he surely should) and we should all still be we. There are even ways, he's said, in which all this is not that unpleasant to think about, since he remembers much of that early time, before bad things happened, as having been "fun." And in that sense, his is a rare species of nostalgia.

He has also told me that as of recently he has begun to picture the thinking process, and that his seems to be made of "concentric rings," bright like hula hoops, one of which is memory, and that he tries but can't make them all "fit down flush on top of each other" in the congruent way he thinks they should—except sometimes just before the precise moment of sleep, when he can briefly forget about everything and feel happy. He has likewise told me about what he refers to as "thinking he's thinking," by which he tries to maintain continuous monitorship of all his thoughts as a way of "understanding" himself and being under control and therefore making life better (though by doing so, of course, he threatens to drive himself nuts). In a way his "problem" is simple: he has become compelled to figure out life and how to live it far too early, long before he's seen a sufficient number of unfixable crises cruise past him like damaged boats and realized that fixing one in six is a damn good average and the rest you have to let go.

All this is not a good recipe, I know. In fact, it's a bad recipe: a formula for a life stymied by ironies and disappointments, as one little outer character tries to make friends with or exert control over another, submerged one but can't. (He could end up as an academic, or a U.N. translator.) Plus, he's left-handed and so is already threatened by earlier-than-usual loss of life, by greater chances of being blinded by flying objects, scalded by pans of hot grease, bitten by rabid dogs, hit by cars piloted by other left-handers, of deciding to live in the Third World, of not getting the ball over the plate consistently, and of being divorced like his Dad and Mom.

My fatherly job, needless to say, is not at all easy at this enforced distance of miles: to coax by some middleman's charm his two foreign selves, his present and his childish past, into a better, more robust and outward-tending relationship—like separate, angry nations seeking one government—and to sponsor self-tolerance as a theme for the future. This, of course, is what any father should do in any life, and I have tried, despite the impediments of divorce and time and of not always knowing my adversary. Only it seems plain to me now, and as Ann believes, I have not been completely successful.

But on this Fourth of July weekend I am picking him up all the way in Connecticut and staging for both our benefits a split-the-breeze father-and-son driving campaign in which we will visit as many sports halls of fame as humanly possible in one forty-eight-hour period (this being only two), winding up in storied Cooperstown, where we'll stay in the venerable Deerslayer Inn, fish on scenic Lake Otsego, shoot off safe and ethical fireworks, eat like castaways, and somehow along the way I'll work (I hope) the miracle only a father can work. Which is to say: if your son begins suddenly to fall at a headlong rate, you must, through the agency of love and greater age, throw him a line and haul him back.

And yet, and yet. Even a good idea can be misguided if embarked on in ignorance. And who could help wondering: Is my surviving son already out of reach and crazy as a Betsy bug, or headed fast in that dire direction? Are his problems the product of haywire neurotransmitters, and only solvable by preëmptive chemicals? (This was the New Haven guy's, Dr. Stopler's, initial view.) Will he turn gradually into a sly recluse with a bad complexion, rotten teeth, bitten nails, yellow eyes, who abandons school early, hits the road, falls in with the wrong bunch, tries drugs, and finally becomes convinced trouble is his only dependable friend, until one sunny Saturday it, too, betrays him in some unthought-of and unbearable way, after which he stops off at a suburban gun store, then spirits on to some quilty mayhem in a public place? (This I frankly don't expect, since he has yet to exhibit any of the "big three" of childhood homicidal dementia: attraction to fire, the need to torture helpless animals, or bed-wetting; and because he is in fact quite softhearted and mirthful, and always has been.) Or, and in the best-case scenario, is he—as happens to us all and as his mother hopes—merely going through a phase, so that in eight weeks he'll be trying out for lonely end on the Deep River junior varsity?

God only knows, right? *Really* knows?

For me, alone without him most of the time, the worst part is that I believe he should now be at an age when he cannot imagine one bad thing happening to him, ever. And yet he can. And sometimes at the Shore or standing streamside as the sun dies and leaves the water black and bottomless, I have looked into his sweet, pale, impermanent, boy's face and known that he squints at a future he's unsure of, from a vantage point he already knows he doesn't like, but toward which he soldiers on because he thinks he should and because, even though in his heart of hearts he knows we're not alike, he wishes that we were and for that likeness to give him assurance.

Naturally enough, I can explain almost nothing to him. Fatherhood by itself doesn't provide wisdom worth imparting; though in preparation for our trip, I've sent him copies of "Self-Reliance" and the Declaration of Independence, and suggested he take a browse. These are not your ordinary fatherly offerings, I admit; yet I believe his instincts are sound and he will help himself if he can, and that independence is, in fact, what he lacks: independence from whatever holds him captive—memory, history, bad events he struggles with, can't control, but feels he should.

A parent's view of what's wrong or right with his kid is probably less accurate than even the next-door neighbor's, who sees the child's life perfectly through a gap in the curtain. I, of course, would like to tell him in a hundred engaging ways how to live and do better, just as I tell myself: that nothing ever neatly "fits," that mistakes must be made, bad things forgotten. But in our short exposures I seem able only to talk glancingly, skittishly, before shying away, cautious not to be wrong, not to quiz or fight him, to be not his therapist but his Dad. So that in all likelihood I will never provide good cure for his disease, will never even imagine correctly what his disease is, but will only suffer it with him for a time, and then depart.

The worst of being a parent is my fate, then: being an adult. Not owning the right language; not dreading the same dreads and contingencies and missed chances; the fate of knowing much yet having to stand like a lamppost with its lamp lit, hoping my child will see the glow and venture closer for the illumination and warmth it mutely offers.

Deep River, as I drive through, is the epitome of dozing, summery, southern New England ambivalence. A little green-shuttered, swept-sidewalk burg where just us regular folks live in stolid acceptance of watered-down Congregationalist and Roman Catholic moderation; whereas down by the river there's the usual enclave of self-contented, pseudo-reclusive richies who've erected humongous houses on bracken and basswood chases bordering the water, their backs resolutely turned to how the other half lives. Endowed law profs from New Haven, moneyed shysters from Hartford and Springfield, moneyed pensioners from Gotham all cruise sunnily in to shop at Greta's Green Grocer, the Flower Basket, Edible Kingdom Meats, and Liquid Time Liquors (less often to visit Body Artistry Tattoo, Adult Newz-and-Video, or the Friendly Loaner pawn), then cruise sunnily back out, their Rovers heaped with pancetta, mesquite, chard, fresh tulips, and gin—all primed for evening cocktails, lamb shanks on the grill, an hour of happy schmoozing, then off to bed in the cool, fog-enticed river breeze. It is not such a great place to think of your children living (or your ex-wife).

I turn toward the river and head down the narrow, curving, woodsy lane where Ann, Charley, and my two children's mailbox resides unnoticeably on a thin cedar post, its dark-green letters indicating "The Knoll." Beside it a rough gravel

HORNED POPPY

Frailest of flowers, armored
to survive at the sea's edge: leaves
tough like holly, hugging the stem
like spiked cuffs; the bud protected
by a prickly sheath; the petals furled
like yellow parachute silk, opening to expose,
at its radiant heart, the threads
of stamens, pollen's loose dust.
It blooms for at the most an hour;
torn apart by the elements it loves.
And then the pistil grows:
a live bootlace, a fuse
of multiplying cells—reaching out
to feel between the shingle's
sharp-edged flints for a moist bed
to lay its seed; or in my kitchen,
drying in the heat, a long thin hand
summoning a salt gale, a tide to roll in
over the flat land, roaring
through the open door.

—Vicki Feaver

car path disappears into anonymous trees, so that an atmosphere of exclusive, possibly less than welcoming habitation greets whoever wanders past: people live here, but you don't know them.

My brain, in the time it's taken me to clear town and wind down into these sylvan purlieus of the rich, has begun to exhibit an unpleasant tightness behind my temples. My neck's sore and there's a feeling of tissue expansion in my upper thorax, as if I ought to burp or gag or possibly just split open for relief's sake. I have slept little and badly, driven too far, devoted too much worry time to thinking about my son.

Though, of course, the most sharpstick truth is—as I pause here for a deep breath—that I am about to pay my former wife a visit in her subsequent and better life; am about to see my orphaned kids gambolling on the wide lawns of their tonier existence; I may even in spite of it all have to make humiliating, grinding conversation with Charley O'Dell, whom I'd just as soon tie up on a beach and leave for the crabs. Who wouldn't have a "swelling" in his brain and a generalized thoracic edema? I'm surprised it isn't a hell of a lot worse.

A small plastic sign I haven't noticed before has been attached to the bottom edge of the O'Dells' mailbox, a little burgundy-colored plaque with green lettering which says, "Here is a Bird Sanctuary. Respect It. Protect Our Future."

Only directly below the box, on the duffy, weedy ground, lies a bird—a grackle or a big cowbird, its eyes glued shut with death, its stiff feathers swarmed by ants. I peer down on it from behind my window and puzzle: Birds die, we all know that. Birds have coronaries, brain tumors, anemia, suffer bad luck and life's battering, then croak like the rest of us—even in a sanctuary where nobody has it in for them and everybody dotes on everything they do. But here? Under their very own sign? Here is odd. And I am, in my brain-tightened unease, suddenly, instantly certain my son's to blame (call it a father's instinct). Plus, as noted, animal torture is one of the bad childhood warning signs, meaning Paul has begun the guerrilla war of spirit-attrition against his foster home, against Charley, against cool lawns, morning mists, matched goldens, sabots, clay courts, and solar panels—against all that's happened outside his control. (I don't completely blame him.)

Not that I approve of dispatching blameless tweeties and leaving them by the mailbox as portents of bad things on the wing. I don't approve. It scares me silly. But as little as I hope to be involved in domestic life here, I also believe an ounce of intervention might deter a pound of cure. So, putting my car in park, I shove open my door and climb out into the heat, my brain still expanding, stoop stiffly down, lift the little dull-feathered, ant-swarmed carcass by its wing tip, take a quick look behind me at Swallow Lane curving out of sight, then quickflip it like a cow chip off into the bushes, where it falls soundlessly, saving my son (I hope) one peck of trouble in a life that may already stretch out long and full of troubles.

Out of ancient habit, I quickly raise my fingers for a sniff check in case I need to go someplace—back up to the Chevron in town—to wash the death smell off. But just as I do, a small dark-blue car (I believe it is a Yugo) with a silver police-shield door decal and silver lettering saying "Agazziz Security" pulls in to block me where I'm standing beside my car.

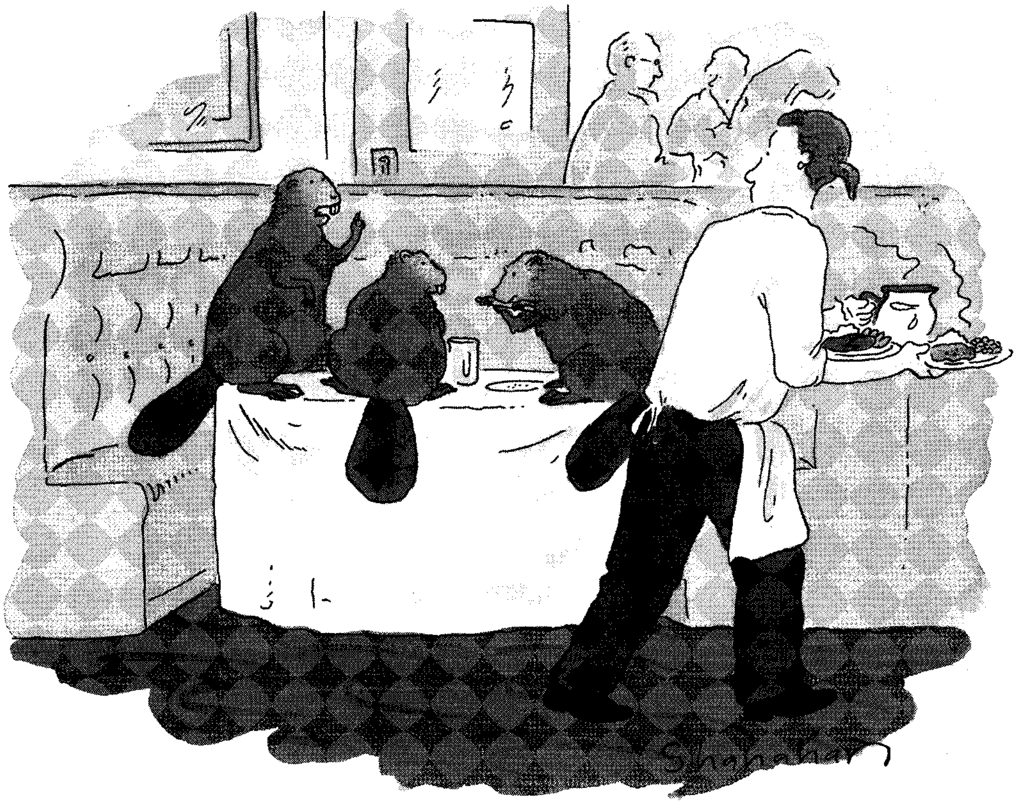
A slender, blond man in a blue uniform gets quickly out, as though I might just take off running into the trees, but then remains behind his door looking at me with an odd, unhumorous smile—a smile any American would recognize—signifying wariness, arrogance, authority, and a conviction that outsiders cause trouble. Possibly he thinks I'm filching mail—ten-reggae-CD offers, or some prime steaks from Idaho, special for high rollers only.

I lower my fingers—unhappily, they *do* smell of feral death—my head tightened back down into my neck sinews. "Hi," I say, extra-cheerful.

"Hi!" the young man says, and nods in some unclear sort of agreement. "Whatcha up to?"

I beam probity at him. "I was just going into the O'Dells here. I've been driving a ways, so I decided to stretch my legs."

"Great," he says, beaming cold indifference back. I can't see a firearm, but he's wearing a miniature microphone that allows him to talk to someone in another location by speaking straight into his own shoulder. "You friends of



"Can we get some more bread sticks over here?"

the O'Dells, are ya?" he says cheerfully.

"Yep. Sure am."

"I'm sorry, but what was it you threw over in the trees?"

"A bird. That was a bird. A dead one."

"O.K.," the officer says, peering over in that direction as if he could see a dead bird, which he can't. "Where'd *it* come from?"

"It got caught by the outside mirror of my car. I didn't notice it till I opened the door. It was a grackle."

"I see. What was it?" (Perhaps he thinks my story will change under interrogation.)

"Grackle," I say, as if the word itself might induce a humorous response, but I'm wrong.

"You know, this is a wildlife sanctuary back here. There isn't any hunting."

"I didn't hunt for it. It got killed accidentally. I was just disposing of it before I drove in with it on my car mirror. I thought that'd be better. It'll be O.K. over there." I look where I'm referring.

"Where you driving from?" His young, weak eyes twitch toward my blue-and-cream Jersey plates, then quickly back up at me so that if I claim I've just driven in from Oracle, Arizona, or International Falls, he'll know to call for backup.

"I'm from down in Haddam, New Jersey." I adopt a voice that says, I'd be glad to help you in any way I can and would write a letter of commendation to your superiors complimenting you on your demeanor the moment I'm back at my desk.

"And what's your name, sir?"

"Bascombe." And I haven't done a goddam thing, I say silently, but toss one dead bird in the bushes to save everybody trouble (though of course I've lied about it). "Frank Bascombe." Cool air surrounds me from my open car door.

"O.K., Mr. Bascombe. If I could just look at your driver's license, I'll get out of your way here." The young rent-a-cop seems pleased, as if these words were the standard words and he positively loves saying them.

"Sure thing," I say, and in a flash have my wallet out and license forked from its little slot below my realtor certification and my Visa.

"If you'd bring it over here and put it on the hood of my car," he says, giving his shoulder mike an adjustment, "I'll have a look at it while you stand back, then I'll put it back and you can pick it up. Is that all right?"

"It's just great. It seems a little elaborate. I could just hand it to you."

I start in the direction of his Yugo, which has a springy little two-way antenna stuck onto its dumpy top. But he nervously says, "Don't approach me, Mr. Bascombe. If you don't want to show your license"—he's eyeing his shoulder mike again—"I can get a Connecticut State Trooper out here, and you can explain your case to him." The blond boy's amiable veneer has, in a heartbeat, disappeared, revealing sinister, police-protocol hardass, bent on construing obvious innocence as obvious guilt. I'm sure his real self is right now trying to figure out how Bascombe is spelled, since it's obviously a Jewish name, remembering that New Jersey's chock-full of Jews and spicks and darkies and towel-heads and Commies, all needing to be rounded up and reminded of some things. I see his hands drifting somewhere below window level and around toward his backside, where he probably has his heat. (I have not provoked this. I am merely handing over my license.)

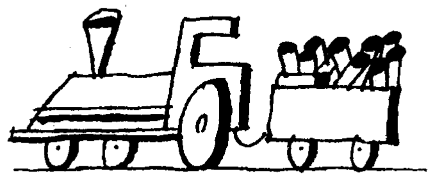
"I don't really have a case," I say, renewing my smile and stepping over to his Yugo and laying my license above the headlight. "I'm happy just to play by the rules." I take a few steps back.

The young man waits till I'm ten steps away, then comes around his door and snakes up my license. I can see his idiotic gold nameplate above his blue shirt pocket: "Erik."

Erik steps around behind his open car door and gives my license a thorough study, which includes looking up at me for a mug-shot match. I see now that he has an almost colorless Hitler Youth mustache on his pale lip, and something tattooed on the back of his hand—a skull maybe, or a snake coiled around a skull. He is also, I can just make out, wearing a tiny gold earring bead in his right lobe. An amusing little combo for Deep River.

He turns my license over, apparently to see if I'm an organ donor (I'm not), then he walks it back around, lays it on the Yugo's hood, and returns to his protective door. I still can't tell if he's packing.

"There you go," he says, with a remnant of his former warmth. I don't know what he's learned, since it wouldn't say on my license if I was a serial killer. "We just have a lot of strangers drive in here, Mr. Bascombe. And people who live in here really don't like being harassed. Which is why we have a job, I guess." He grins amiably. We're friends now.



"I hate it, myself," I say, coming over and snugging my license back in my billfold. I wonder if Erik got a whiff of the dead-bird stink.

"You probably be surprised the number of wackos come off that I-95, and they end up back in here just roaming around."

"I believe it," I say. "A hundred per cent." And then, for some reason, I am enervated, as if I'd been to jail for days and had just this very moment stepped out into harsh daylight.

"Particularly on your holidays," says Erik the sociologist. "And especially *this* holiday. This one brings out the psychos from *all* over. New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania." He shakes his head. Those are the states where most lunatics live, if you're him. "You old friends with Mr. O'Dell?" He smiles, protected by his door. "I like him a lot."

"No," I say, stepping back to my car, which still has cold air pouring out, making me feel even more enervated.

"You're just business acquaintances, I guess," he says. "You an architect?"

"No," I say, "my ex-wife's married to Mr. O'Dell, and I'm picking up my son to take him on a trip. Does that seem like a good idea?" I can easily imagine wanting to harm Erik.

"Wow, that sounds pretty serious." He leers from behind his open blue door. He's, of course, got me figured now. I'm a defeated, pathetic figure engaged in a demeaning and hopeless mission—not nearly as interesting as a wacko.

"It's not that serious," I say, pausing, looking at him. "It's something I enjoy."

"Is Paul *your* son?" Erik says. He brings his forefinger up to his earring, a small gesture of dominion.

"Yep. You know Paul?"

"Oh yeah," Erik says, smirking. "We're all acquainted with Paul."

"All who? What does that mean?" I feel my brows thicken.

"We've all had contact with Paul." Erik starts lowering himself back into his stupid Yugo.

"I'm sure he hasn't caused you any

trouble," I say, thinking that he probably has, and will again. Erik is the kind of monkey Paul would consider a barrel of laughs.

He pulls the door shut, drops the Yugo in reverse, scoots back out the drive, and wheels around. He's saying something from the driver's seat, no doubt something smart-assed.

I consider answering with something vicious, running over and screaming in his window. But I can't afford to get arrested in my ex-wife's driveway. So I only wave, and he waves back. I think he says, "Have a good day."

My daughter, Clarissa, is the first living soul I spy as I drive tired-eyed into compound O'Dell. She is far below the big house, on the ample lawn-slope above the pond, committedly whacking a yellow tetherball all by her lonesome, oblivious as a sparrow of me here in my car, surveying her from afar.

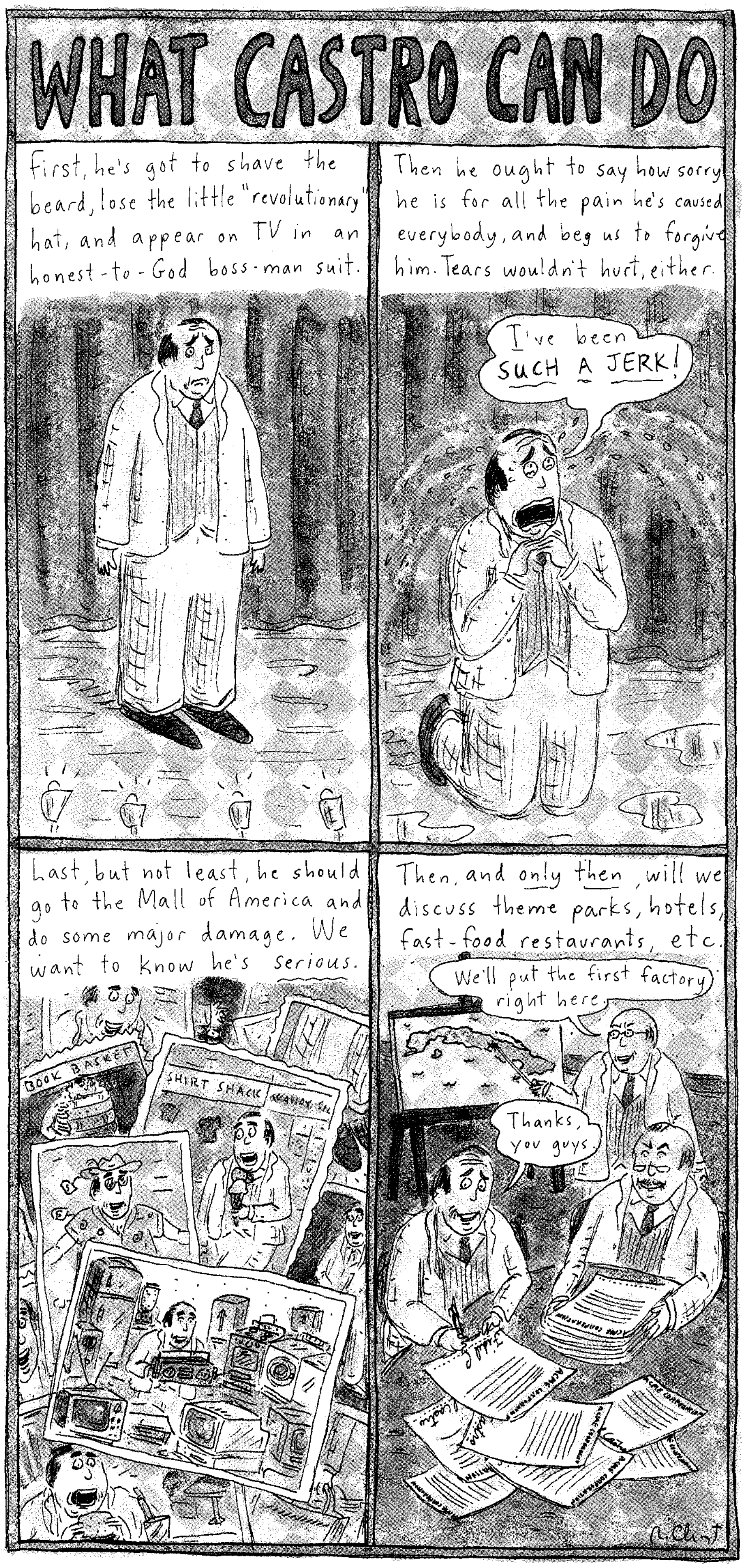
I pull up to the back of the house (the front faces the lawn, the air, the water, the sunrise, and for what I know the path to all knowledge) and climb wearily out into the hot, chirpy morning, reconciled to finding Paul by myself.

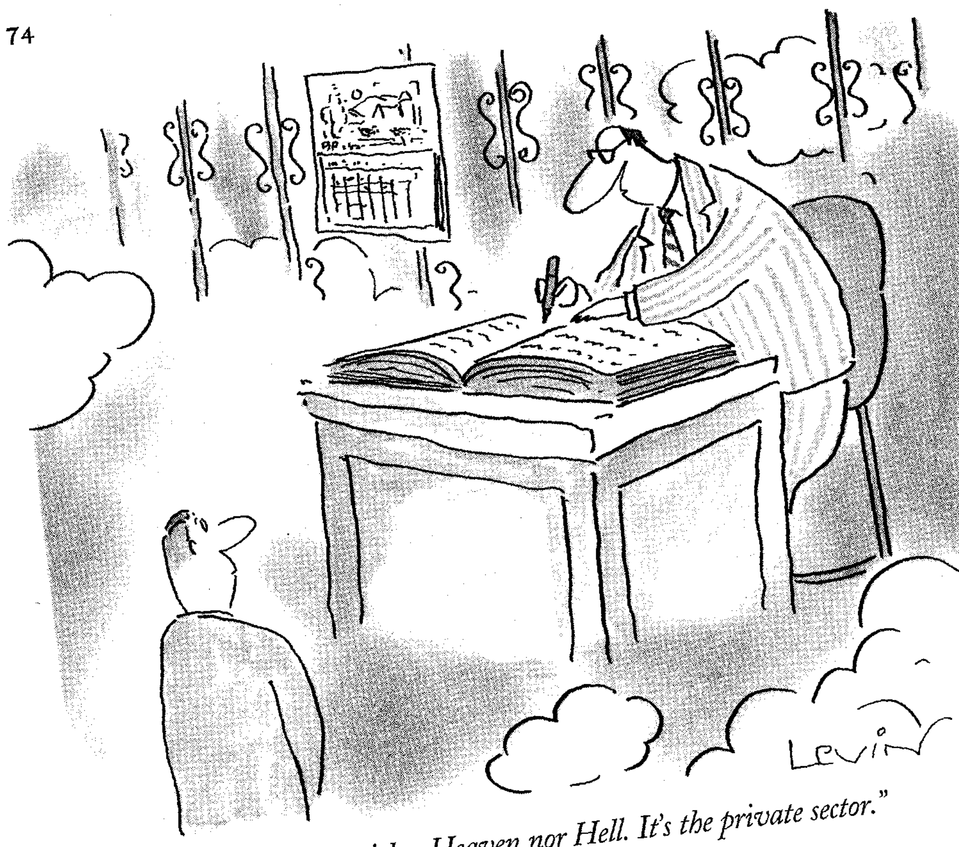
Charley's house is, of course, a glorious erection, chalky-blue-shingled and white-trimmed, with a complex gabled roof, tall, unmullioned windows, and a big sashaying porch around three sides that gives onto the lawn down some white steps.

I wedge in sideways through the row of purple-blooming hydrangeas, stagger only slightly, but walk out onto the hot, shadowless grass, feeling light-legged and dazed, my eyelids flickering, my eyes darting side to side to see who might see me first (such entrances are never dignified). I have, to my eternal infamy, forgotten to bring a gift, a love-and-peace offering to appease Clarissa for not taking her along with her brother. I am lost here.

Clarissa ceases larking with the tetherball when she sees me, and stands, eyes shaded, averting her face and waving, though she can't tell it's me she sees—possibly hopes it is and not a plainclothes policeman come to ask questions about her brother.

I wave back, realizing for some reason known only to God that I have begun to *limp*, as though a war had intervened


WHAT CASTRO CAN DO
First, he's got to shave the beard, lose the little "revolutionary" hat, and appear on TV in an honest-to-God boss-man suit.
Then he ought to say how sorry he is for all the pain he's caused everybody, and beg us to forgive him. Tears wouldn't hurt, either.
I've been SUCH A JERK!
Last, but not least, he should go to the Mall of America and do some major damage. We want to know he's serious.
BOOK BASKET
SHIRT SHACK
CANDY
Then, and only then, will we discuss theme parks, hotels, fast-food restaurants, etc.
We'll put the first factory right here.
Thanks, you guys.



"This is neither Heaven nor Hell. It's the private sector."

since I last saw my children and I had returned a changed and beaten veteran. Clarissa, I'm sure, will not notice. Though she sees me rarely—once a month, nowadays—I am a timeless fixture, and nothing would seem unusual: an eye patch, a prosthetic arm, all new teeth, none would rate a mention.

"Hi-dee, hi-dee, hi-dee," she sings out when it's clearly me she's waving welcome to. She wears strong contacts and can't see distances well, but doesn't care. She darts and springs barefoot toward me across the dry grass, ready to deliver a big power hug around my aching neck—which, every time, hurts like a hammerlock and makes me groan.

"I came as soon as I heard the news," I say. (In our makeshift, make-believe life I always arrive just in time to face some dire emergency—Clarissa and I being the responsible adults, Paul and their mother the temperamental kids in need of rescue.) I am still limping, though my heart's going strong with simple pleasure, all tightness in my brain miraculously dispatched.

"Paul's in the house with Mom, getting ready and probably having an argument."

Clarissa, in brilliant-red shorts over her blue Speedo suit, jumps up and gives me her hammer hug, and I swing her like a tetherball before letting her sink weak-kneed into the grass. She has a wonderful smell—dampness and girlish perfume applied hours before, now faded. Beyond us is the boathouse, the pond again dense with pink fleabane and wild callas, and, farther on, the row of dense motionless tupelos and the invisible Connecticut, above which a squad of pelicans executes a slow and graceful upward soar.

"Where's the man of the house?" I let myself down heavily beside her, my back against the tetherball pole. Clarissa's legs are thin and tanned and golden-sheeny haired, her bare feet milky and without a blemish. She arranges herself belly down, chin propped, her eyes clear behind her contacts and fastened on me, her face a prettier version of my own: small nose, blue eyes, cheekbones more obvious than her mother's, whose broad, Dutch forehead and coarse hair match Paul's looks almost completely.

"He's working now in his studi-o-o." She looks at me knowingly and without much irony. It's life to her, all this—few tragedies, few great, singing victories, everything pretty much good or O.K. We are well paired in our family unit.

Charley's studio is half-visible beyond a row of deep-green hardwoods that boundaries the lawn and stops at the pond's edge. It is an authentic seaman's chapel, built on cypress stilts, with a catwalk right out in the pond. I see a glint off its roof. It is a project Charley and his Yale roommate doped out as a joke freshman year, back in '44, but that Charley "*had* to build." It is, of course, ludicrous.

"So, how's the weather?" I say, relieved to know where he is.

"Oh, it's fine," Clarissa says noncommittally. A skim of sweat is on her temples from belting the tetherball. My back's already sweaty through my madras shirt.

"And how's your brother?"

"Weird. But O.K." Maintaining her belly-down position, she rotates her head around on its slender stem, some routine from dance class or gymnastics, though an unmistakable signal: she is Paul's *buen amiga*; the two of them are closer than the two of us; this all could've been different with better parents, but isn't; do not fail to notice it.

"Is your mom O.K., too?"

Clarissa stops rotating her head and wrinkles her nose as though I'd announced an unsavory subject, then rolls over on her back and stares skyward. "She's much worse," she says, and looks unconvincingly worried.

"Worse than what?"

"Than you!" She rounds her eyes upward in mock surprise. "She and Charley had a howler this week. And they had one last week, too. And one the week before." ("Howlers" mean big disputes, not embarrassing verbal miscues.) "Hmmmm, hmm, hmm," she says, meaning most of what she knows is being retained silently. I of course can't quiz her on this subject—a cardinal rule once divorce has become the governing institution—though I wish I knew more.

I pluck up a blade of grass, press it between my two thumbs like a woodwind reed, and blow, making a sputtery, squawky but still fairly successful soprano-sax note: a skill from aeons back.

"Can you play 'Gypsy Road' or 'Born in the U.S.A.'?" She sits up.

"That's my whole repertoire on grass," I say, putting my two hands down on her kneecaps, which are cold and bony and soft all at once. Conceivably she can smell dead grackle. "Your ol' dad loves you. I'm sorry I have to kidnap Paul and not all two of you. I'd rather travel as a trio."

"He's much needier now," Clarissa says, and drags a blade of grass all her own across the back of my hands where they rest on her perfect kneecaps. "I'm way ahead of him emotionally. I'll have my period pretty soon." She looks up at me profoundly, fattens the corners of her mouth, and slowly lets her eyes cross and keeps them that way.

"Well, that's good to know," I say, my heart going *kerwhonk*, my eyes suddenly hot and unhappily moist—not with unhappy tears, but with unhappy sweat that has busted out on my forehead. "And how old *are* you?" I ask, *ker-whonk.* "Thirty-seven or thirty-eight?"

"Thirty-twelve," she says, and lightly pokes my knuckles with the grass blade.

"O.K., that's old enough. You don't need to be any older. You're perfect."

"Charley knows Bush," she says with a sour face. "Did you hear that?" Her blue eyes elevate gravely to mine. This is a grave business to her. All that Charley might conceivably have been forgiven is reassigned to him with this choice bit of news. My daughter, like her old man, is a Democrat of the New Deal bent, and considers most Republicans, and particularly V.P. Bush, barely mentionable dickheads.

"I guess I knew that without knowing it." I scour my two fingers on the turf to clean off the death smell.

"He's for the party of money, tradition, and influence," she says, much too big for her britches, since Charley's tradition and influence are paying her bills, keeping her in tetherballs, tutus, and violin lessons. She is for the party of no tradition, no influence, no nothing, also like her father.

"He has his rights," I say, and add a lackluster "I mean that."

Clarissa stares at her blade of grass, wondering, I'm sure, why she has to accord Charley any rights. "Sweetheart," I say solemnly, "is there anything you can tell me about ol' Paul? I don't want you to tell me a deep, dark secret, just maybe a shallow, light one. It would be as-you-know-held-in-strictest-confidence." I say this last to make it halfway a joke and to let her feel comradely about providing some lowdown.

She stares at the thick grass carpet in silence, then angles her head over and squints up at the house with the flowering bushes and the white porch and stairs. Atop the highmost roof pinnacle, in the midst of all the springing angles and gable ends, is an American flag (a small one) on a staff, rustling in an unfelt breeze.

"Are you sad?" she says. In her sun-blond hair I see a tiny red ribbon tied in a bow, something I hadn't noticed, but instantly revere her for, since, along with her question, it makes her seem a person of complex privacies.

"No, I'm not sad, except that you can't go with Paul and me to Cooperstown. And I forgot to bring you anything. That's pretty sad."

"Do you have a car phone?" She raises her eyes accusingly.

"No."

"Do you have a beeper?"

"No, afraid not." I smile at her knowingly.

"How do you keep up with your calls then?" She squints, making her look a hundred.

"I guess I don't get that many calls. Sometimes there's a message from you on my answering box, though not that often."

"I know."

"You didn't answer me about Paul, sweetheart. All I really want to do is be a good pappy, if I can."

"His problems are all stress-related," she says officially. She plucks up another blade of quite green and dry grass and slips it into the cuff of my chinos where I'm cross-legged behind her.

"What stress is he suffering from?"

"I don't know."

"Is that your best diagnosis?"

"Yes."

"How 'bout you? Do you have any stress-related problems?"

"No." She shakes her head, makes a pruny pucker with her lips. "Mine'll come out later, if I have any."

"Who told you so?"

"TV." She looks at me earnestly, as though to say that TV has its good points, too.

Somewhere high in the firmament I hear a hawk cry out, or possibly an osprey, though when I look up I can't see it.

"What can I do about Paul's stress-related problems?" I ask, and God be gracious I wish she would pipe up with

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a nice answer. I’d put it into action before the sun sets. Somewhere, then, another noise—not a hawk but a thumping, a door slamming or a window being shut, a drawer being closed. When I look up, Ann is standing at the porch rail, watching down on us across the lawn. I sense she’s just arrived, but would like my chat with Clarissa to come to a close and me to get on with my business. I make a friendly ex-husband-who-wishes-no-trouble wave, a gesture that makes me feel not so good. “I believe that’s your mom.”

Clarissa looks up at the porch. “Yeah, hi,” she says.

“We better dust off our britches here.” She will, I see, out of ancient, honorable loyalty, offer no help with her brother. She fears, I suppose, divulging compromising secrets while claiming only to love him. Children are wise to adult ways now, thanks to us.

“Paul might be happier if you could maybe live in Deep River, or maybe Old Saybrook,” she says as if these words require immense discipline, nodding her head slightly with each one. (Parents can break up, fall out of love, get searingly divorced, marry others, move miles away; but as far as kids are concerned most of it’s tolerable if one parent will just tag along behind the other like a slave.)

There was, of course, in the savage period after Ann moved away in ’84, a dolorous time when I haunted these very hills and streamsides like a shamus; cruised its middle-school parking lots, its street corners and back alleys; cased its arcades and skating rinks, its Finasts and Burger Kings, merely to be in visual contact with wherever my children *might* spend the days and afternoons they could’ve been spending with me. I even went so far as to price a condo in Essex, a sterile little listening post from which I could keep “in touch,” keep love alive.

Only it would’ve made me even more morose, as morose as a hundred lost hounds, to wake up alone in a condo! In Essex! Awaiting my appointed pickup hour with the kids, expecting to take them back where? To my condo? And afterward, glowering back down I-95 for a befuddled workweek until Friday, when the lunacy commenced again? There are parents who don’t blink an eye at that kind of bashing around, who’d ruin their own lives and everybody’s within ten miles if they could prove—long after all the horses are out of the barn—that they’ve always been good and faithful providers.

But I simply am not one of these; and I have been willing to see my kids less often, for the three of us to shuttlecock up and back, so that I can keep alive in Haddam a life they can fit into, even if precariously, when they will, and meanwhile maintain my sanity, instead of forcing myself into places where I don’t belong and making everybody hate me. It’s not the best solution, since I miss them achingly, but it’s better to be a less than perfect Dad than a perfect goofball.

“Sweetheart,” I say tenderly to my daughter, “if I lived up here, your mother wouldn’t like it at all, and you and Paul wouldn’t come stay in your own rooms and see your old friends in need. Sometimes you can change things and just make them worse.”

“I know,” she says bluntly. I’m sure Ann hasn’t discussed with her Paul’s coming to live with me, and I have no idea what her opinion will be. Perhaps she’ll welcome it. Loyalty aside, I might if I were her.

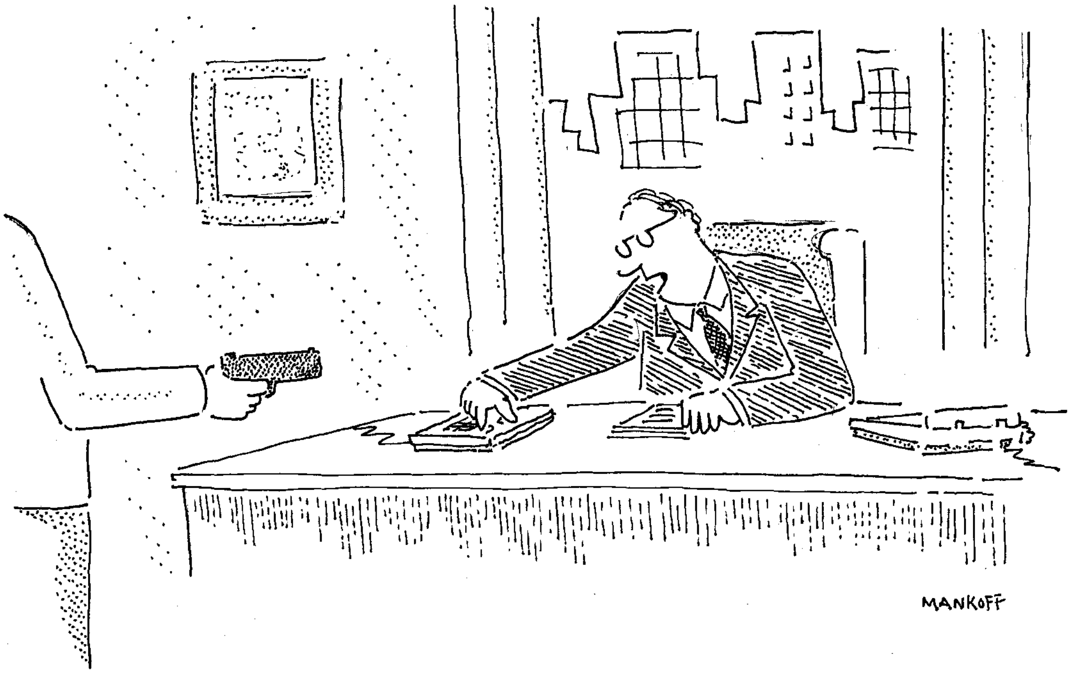
She reaches fingers into her yellow hair, her mouth going into a scowl of application. She pulls the little red bow out along the fine blond strands until she frees it, still tied, and hands it to me rather matter-of-factly. “Here’s my *latest* present,” she says. “You can be my bow.”

“That’s another kind of bow,” I say, taking the little frill in my hand and squeezing it. “They’re spelled different.”

“Yeah, I know. It’s O.K., though, this time.”

“Thanks.” Once again, sadly, I have nothing to trade as an act of devotion.

And then she is up and on her bare feet, spanking the seat of her red shorts and shaking out her hair, looking down like a small lioness with a tangled mane. I am less quick but am up, too, using the tetherball pole. I look toward the house, where no one’s standing on the porch now. A smile is for some reason on my lips, my hand on my daughter’s bony bare shoulder, her red bow, my badge of courage, clutched in my other hand, as we start—the two of us—together up the wide hill.



“Davis, come in here and take a bullet.”

ANN and I are seated resolutely on the big porch in two oversized green wicker chairs furnished with oversized flowery cushions of some lush and complex lily-pad pattern. She has brought out an old-timey amber-glass pitcher of iced tea which Clarissa has fixed and drawn a fat happy face on. The tea and glasses and little pewter ice bucket are situated on a low table at knee level, as we, the two of us, wait for Paul, who is slow to rustle his bones. The river, visible now above the serrated treetops, is aglitter with dainty sailboats sporting rust-colored sails, their masts steadfast, as the wind transports them up the current toward Hartford. All boats of a certain class rising on a rising tide.

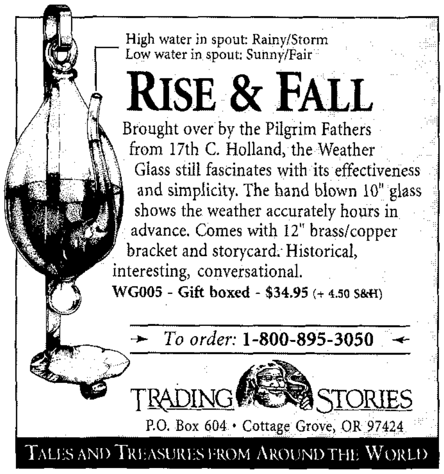
Ann runs a comb-of-fingers back through her thick, athletically shortened hair, which she's highlighted so that sudden blond strands shine from within. She is wearing white golfing shorts and an expensive-looking sleeveless top of some earthy taupe color that fits loosely and shows off her breasts semi-mysteriously, and tan tassel shoes that cause her tanned legs to look even longer and stauncher, stirring in me a low-boil sexual whirr that makes me gladder to be alive than I ever expected to feel today. I've noticed in the last year a subtle widening of Ann's wonderful derrière, and a faint thickening and loosening of the flesh above her knees and on her upper arms. To my view, a certain tense girlishness, always present (and which I never really liked), has begun subsiding, and is being replaced by a softer, womanly, but in every way more substantial and appealing adultness I admire immensely. (I might mention this if I had time to make clear I liked it; though I see she is wearing Charley's pretentious, plain gold band today, and the whole idea seems ridiculous.)

She has not asked me to come inside to wait, though I'd already decided to stay clear of the glassed-in malaise-filled "family room," which I can just see into through the long, mirror-tinted windows beside me. Charley has, of course, installed a big antique telescope there, complete with all the necessary brass knobs and fittings, engraved logarithmic calibrations and moon phases, and with which I'm sure he can bring in the Tower of London if he takes a notion. I can also make out the ghostly white beast of a grand piano and beside it a Beaux-Arts music stand where Ann and Clarissa almost certainly play Mendelssohn duets for Charley's delectation on many a cold winter's eve. It is a tiresome recognition.

Truth is, the one time I ever waited inside (picking up the kids for a day trip to the fish elevator at South Hadley) I ended up waiting alone for nearly an hour, leafing through the coffee-table library ("Classic Holes of Golf," "Erotic Cemetery Art," "Sailing"), eventually working my way down to a hot-pink flyer from a women's clinic in New London offering an enhance-your-sexual-performance workshop, which made me instantly panicky. Prudenter now just to stay on the porch and risk feeling like a grinning high-school kid forced to make deadpan parental chitchat while I await my date.

Ann has already explained to me that yesterday was a day for harrowing events. Not only, it seems, did Paul and Charley get into an argument over the proper way to wax Charley's dinghy, at the end of which argument Paul got so angry he actually clobbered Charley with an oarlock, but Paul also went on to inform his mother in the very living room I won't enter and in front of damaged-goods Charley himself that she "needed" to get rid of "asshole Chuck." After that he marched out, got in his mother's Mercedes wagon, and hit off on a brief tear, barrel-assing unlicensed out the drive at a high speed, missing the very first curve on Swallow Lane and sideswiping a two-hundred-year-old mountain ash on the neighbor's property (a lawyer). In the process, he banged his head into the steering wheel, popped the air bag, and cut his ear so that he had to take a stitch at the Old Saybrook walk-in clinic. Erik, the man from Agazziz, had arrived moments after the crash—in the same way he apprehended me—and escorted Paul home. No police were called. Later, Paul disappeared again on foot, and came home long past dark. (Ann heard him bark once in his room.)

She, of course, called Dr. Stopler, who calmly informed her that medical science knew mighty damn little about how the old mind works in relation to the old brain—whether they're one and the same pancake, two parts of one pancake, or just altogether different pancakes that somehow work in unison (like an automobile clutch). However, distressed family relations were pretty clear bugaboo factors leading to childhood mental illness, and from what he already knew, Paul did have some qualifying preconditions: dead brother, divorced parents, absent father, two major household moves before puberty (plus Charley O'Dell for a stepdad). He did allow, though, that when he'd conducted his evaluative "chat" with Paul back in May, prior to his Camp Wanapi visit, Paul had failed entirely to exhibit low self-esteem, suicide ideation, or neurological dysfunction. Though circum-



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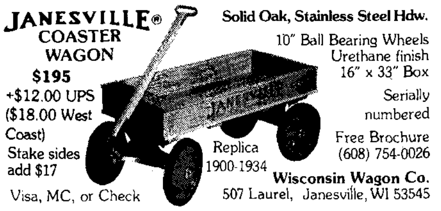

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stances could always change overnight, and Paul could easily be suffering any and every one of these maladies at this very minute.

"I'm really just pissed off at him now," Ann says. She is standing, looking out over the porch rail where I first saw her today, staring across the apron of shining river toward the few small white house façades catching the sun from deep in the encroachment of solid greens. She rubs the back of her left calf with the top of her right shoe and sighs. "You may not know exactly how lucky you've had it," she says, after a period of silent staring.

I mean to say nothing. A careful review of how lucky I am could too easily lead to a renewed airing of my life's misdeeds and tie in to the possibility that I am a coward or a liar or worse. I scratch my nose and can *still* smell grackle on my fingers.

She looks around at where I sit, not very comfortably silent on my lily pad.

"Would you agree to seeing Dr. Stopler?"

"As a patient?" I blink.

"As a co-parent," she says. "*And* as a patient."

"I'm really not based in New Haven," I say. "And I never much liked shrinks. They just try to make you act like everybody else."

"You don't have that to worry about." She regards me in an impatient, older-sister way. "I just thought if you and I, or maybe you and I and Paul, went down, we might iron some things out. That's all."

"We can invite Charley, if you want to. He's probably got some ironing out that needs doing. He's a co-parent, too, right?"

"He'll go. If I ask him."

I look around at the mirror window, behind which sits the spectral white piano and a lot of ultra-modern blond wood furniture arranged meticulously between long sherbet-colored walls to maximize the experience of an interesting inner space while remaining unimaginably comfy. I see, reflected, the azure sky, part of the lawn, an inch of the boathouse roof, and a line of far treetops. It is a vacant vista, the acme of opulent American dreariness Ann has for some reason married into. I feel like getting up and walking out onto the lawn—to wait for my son in the grass. I don't care to see Dr. Stopler and have my weaknesses vetted. My weaknesses, after all, have taken me this far.

Behind the glass, though, and unexpectedly, the insubstantial figure of my daughter becomes visible crossing left to right, heading where I don't know. As she passes she gazes out at us—her parents, bickering—and, blithely assuming I can't see her, flips one or both of us the bird in a spiralling, heightening, conjuring motion, like an ornate salaam, then disappears through a door to another segment of the house.

"I'll think about Dr. Stopler," I say. "I'm still not sure what a milieu therapist is, though."

The corners of Ann's mouth thicken with disapproval—of me. "Maybe you could think of your children as a form of self-discovery. Maybe you'd see your interest in it then, and do something a little more wholeheartedly yourself." Ann's view is that I'm a halfhearted parent; my view is that I do the best I know how.

The fact is, of course, Ann maintains a very unclear picture of me and my current life's outlines. She has never appreciated the realty business or why I enjoy it—doesn't think it actually involves *doing* anything. She knows nothing of my private life beyond what the kids snitch about, doesn't know what trips I take, what books I read. I've become, over time, fuzzier and fuzzier, which, given her old Michigan factualism, makes her inclined to disapprove of almost anything I might do except possibly joining the Red Cross and dedicating my life to feeding starving people on faraway shores.

Only I don't actually mind it, since not having a clear picture of me makes her long for one, and in so doing indirectly long for me (or that's my position). Absence, in this scheme, both creates and fills a much needed void.

But it's not all positive: when you're divorced you're always wondering (I am, anyway, sometimes to the point of granite preoccupation) what your ex-spouse is thinking about you, how she's viewing your decisions (assuming she thinks you make any), whether she's envious or approving or condescending or sneeringly reproachful, or just indifferent.

Your life, because of this, can become God-damned awful, and decline into being a "function" of your view of *her* view—like watching the salesman in the clothing-store mirror to see if he's admiring you in the loud plaid suit you haven't quite decided to buy, but will if he seems to approve. Therefore, I'd prefer Ann to see me as a man who's made a spirited recovery from a lost and unhappy union and gone on to discover wholesome choices and pretty solutions to life's thorny dilemmas. Failing that, I'd be happy to keep her in the dark.

Though in the end the real trick to divorce remains, given this refractory increase in perspectives, not viewing *yourself* ironically and losing heart. You have, on the one hand, such an obsessively detailed and minute view of yourself from your prior existence, and, on the other hand, an equally specific view of yourself *later on*, that it becomes almost impossible not to see yourself as a puny human oxymoron, and damn near impossible sometimes to recognize who your self is at all. Only you must.

ANN has assumed a seat on the porch railing, with one strong, winsome brown knee up, the other swinging. She is half facing me and half observing the red-sailed regatta, most of whose sails have moved behind the tree line. "I'm sorry," she says moodily, "tell me where you two're going again? You told me, but I forgot."

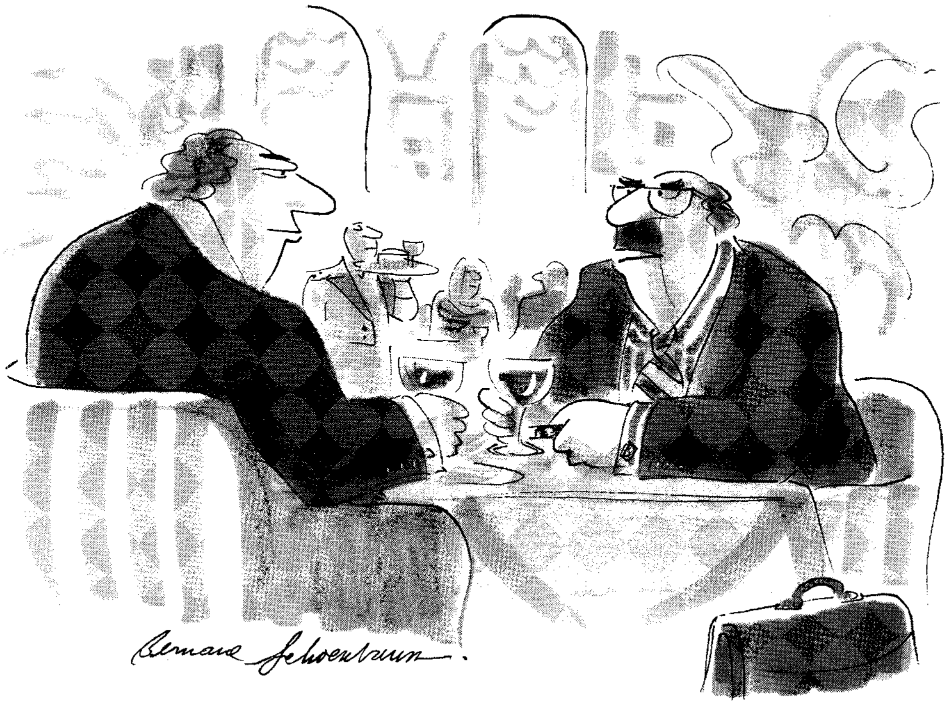
"We're heading up to Springfield this morning." I say this cheerfully, happy to change the subject away from me. "We're having a 'sports lunch' at the Basketball Hall of Fame. Then we're driving over to Cooperstown by tonight. Tomorrow morning we're touring the Baseball Hall of Fame." I smile a reliable, you're-in-good-hands-with-Allstate smile.

"He's not really a big baseball fan, is he?" She says this almost plaintively. She has tried to teach him.

"He knows more than you think he knows. Plus, going to Cooperstown is the ur father-son experience." I erase my smile to let her know I'm only half-bluffing.

"So, have you thought up some important fatherly things to say to solve his problems?" She squints at me and tugs at her earlobe exactly the way Charley tugs his.

I, however, intend not to give away the



"Don't get me wrong. Legality has its place."

particulars of what I'll say to Paul on our trip, since it's too easy to break one's fragile skein of worthwhile purpose by jousting with casual third-party skepticism.

"My view is sort of a facilitator's view," I say, hopefully. "I just think he's got some problems figuring out a good conception of himself"—to put it mildly—"and I want to offer a better one so he doesn't get too attached to the one he's hanging on to now, which doesn't seem too successful. A defective attitude can get to be your friend if you don't look out. It's sort of a problem in risk management. He has to risk trying to improve by giving up what's maybe comfortable but not working. It's not easy." I would smile again, but my mouth has gone dry as cardboard saying this much and trying to seem what I am—sincere. I drink down a gulp of iced tea, which is sweet the way a child would like it and has lemon and mint and cinnamon and God knows what else in it, and tastes terrible. Clarissa's finger-drawn happy face has droozled down and become a scowling jack-o'-lantern in the heat.

"Do you think you're a good person to instruct him about risk management?" Ann suddenly looks toward the river, as if she'd heard an unfamiliar sound out in the summer atmosphere.

"I'm not that bad at it," I say.

"No." She is still looking off. "Not at risk management. I guess not."

I hear a noise myself, unfamiliar and nearby, and stand up to the porch rail and peer over the lawn, hoping I'll see Paul coming up the hill. But to the left, at the edge of the hardwoods, I can see, instead, all of Charley's studio. As advertised, it is a proper, old New England seaman's chapel raised ten cockamamie feet above the pond surface on cypress pilings. The church paint has been blasted off, leaving the lapped boards exposed. Windows are big, tall, clear lancets. The tin roof simmers in the sun of nearly noon.

And then Charley himself makes an appearance on the little back deck (happily in miniature), fresh from this morning's brainstorms—cooking up super plans for some rich neurosurgeon's ski palace in Big Sky, or a snorkeling hideaway in Cabo Cartouche—Berlioz still booming in his oversized ears. Barechested, tanned, and silver-topped, in his usual khaki shorts, he is transporting from inside what looks like a plate of something, which he places on a low table beside a single wooden chair. I wish I could crank his big telescope down and survey the oarlock damage. That would interest me. (It's never easy to see why your ex-wife marries the man she marries if it isn't you again.)

I would like, however, to talk about Paul now; about the possibility of his coming down to Haddam to live, so as to stop limiting my fathering to weekends and holidays. I haven't entirely thought through all the changes to my own private dockets that his arrival will necessitate, the new noises and new smells in my air, new concerns about time, privacy, modesty; possibly a new appreciation for my own *moment* and freedoms, my *role:* a man retuned to the traditional, riding herd on a son full time—duties dads are made for and that I have missed but crave.

But I'm thwarted by what to say and frankly inhibited by Ann. (Perhaps this is another goal of divorce—to reinstitute the inhibitions you dispensed with when things were peachy.) It's tempting just to push off toward less controversial topics: real estate, possibly, or Dukakis's chances against Bush.

But Ann suddenly says, apropos of nothing, but also, of course, of everything, "It's not really easy being an ex-spouse, is it? There isn't much use for us in the grand plan. We don't help anything go forward. We just float around unattached, even if we're not unattached." She rubs her nose with the back of her hand and snuffs. It's as if she's seen us, outside our real bodies, like ghosts above the river, and is wishing we'd go away.

"There's always one thing we can do," I say. She makes a point of rarely using my name unless she's angry, so that most of the time I just seem to overhear her and offer a surprise reply.

"And what's that?" She looks at me disapprovingly, her dark brows clouded, her leg twitching in a barely detectable, spasmic way.

"Get married to each other again," I say, "just to state the obvious." (Though not necessarily the inevitable.) "Last year I sold houses to three couples"—two, actually—"each of whom was at one time married and who got divorced and married, then divorced, then married their original true loves again. If you can say it you can do it, I guess."

"We can put that on your tombstone," Ann says, with patent distaste. "It's the story of your life. You don't know what you're going to say next, so you don't know what's a good idea. But if *it* wasn't a good idea to be married to you seven years ago, why would it be a better idea now? *You're* not any better." (This is unproved.) “It's conceivable you're worse.”

Ann scrutinizes Charley treading long-strided, barefoot, bare-chested, back inside his studio, no doubt to see if his miso is ready and to dig the soy sauce and shallots out of the Swedish mini-fridge. Charley, I notice, walks in a decidedly head-forward, hump-shouldered, craning way that makes him look surprisingly old—he's only sixty-one—but which makes *me* experience a sudden, unexpected, and absolutely unwanted and impolitic sympathy for him. A good head shot with an oarlock is more telling on a man his age.

“You like thinking I ought to be sorry I married Charley. But I'm not sorry. Not at all,” Ann says, her tan shoe giving another nervous little twitch. “He's a much better person than you are.” (Grossly unproved.) “Not that you have any reason to believe that, since you don't know him. He even has a good opinion of you. He tries to be a pal to these children, though. He thinks we've done a better than average job with them. He's nice to me. He tells the truth. He's faithful.” (My ass as a bet on that, though I could be wrong. Some men are.) My unmerited sympathy for him goes flapping away.

“I guess I didn't realize he held me in high esteem,” I say. (I'm sure he doesn't.) “Maybe we should be best friends.”

Ann just shakes her head, rejecting me the way a great actor rejects a heckler in the audience—utterly and without really noticing.

“Do you even think you know why you and I got unmarried?” She takes a brief, angling look at me. I'd rather not be delving into the past now, but into the future or at least the present, where I'm most at home. It's all my fault, though, for rashly bringing up the queasy matter of—or at least the word—marriage.

“I'm on record,” I say, to answer her fair and square, “as believing our son died and you and I tried to cope with it but couldn't. Then I left home for a time and had some girlfriends, and you filed for divorce because you wanted me gone.” I look at her haltingly, as if in describing that time in our life I'd as much as stated a Goya could've easily been painted by a grandmother in Des Moines. “Maybe I'm wrong.”

Ann is nodding as if she's trying to get my view straight in her head. “I divorced you,” she says slowly and meticulously, “because I didn't like you. And I didn't like you because I didn't trust you. Do you think you ever told me the truth once, the whole truth?” She taps her fingers on her bare thigh, not looking my way. (This is the perpetual theme of her life: the search for truth, and truth's defeat by the forces of contingency, most frequently represented by yours truly.)

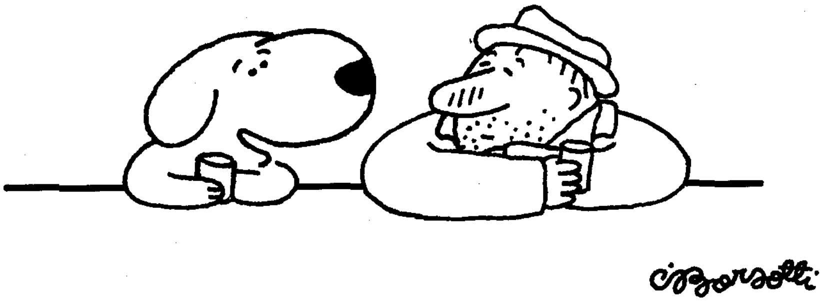
“Tell the truth about what?” I say.

“Anything,” she says, gone rigid.

“I told you I loved you. That was true. I told you I didn't want to get divorced. That was true too. What else was there?”

“There were important things that weren't being admitted by you. There's no use going into it now.” She nods some more as if to ratify this. Though there is in her voice unexpected sadness and even a tremor of remorse, which makes my heart swell and my air passage stiffen, so that for one long, festering moment I'm unable to speak. (I've been badly slipped up on here: she is distraught and dejected, and I cannot answer.)

“For a time,” she continues, very, very softly and carefully, having slightly recovered herself, “for a long time, really, I knew we weren't all the way *to* the truth with each other. But that was O.K., because we were trying to get there together. But suddenly I just felt hopeless, and I saw that truth didn't really exist to you. Though you got it from me the whole time.”



“Talk? Hell, after a few drinks you can't shut me up.”

Ann was forever suspecting other people were happier than she was, that other husbands loved their wives more, achieved greater intimacy, on and on. It is probably not unusual in modern life. But this is the final, belated judgment on our ancient history: why love failed, why life broke into this many pieces and made this pattern, who at long last is to blame. Me. And yet I so suddenly want to put my hand on her knee in hopes of consoling her that I do—I put my hand on her knee in hopes of consoling her.

“Can't you tell me something specific?” I say gently. “Women? Or something I thought? Or something you thought I thought? A second family somewhere?”

“It wasn't something specific,” she says painstakingly. Then stops. “Let's just talk about buying and selling houses now. You're very good at that.” She turns an unpleasant and estimating eye on me. She doesn't bother to remove my warm and clammy hand from her smooth knee. “I wanted somebody with a true heart, that's all. That wasn't you.”

“God damn it, I have a true heart,” I say. Shocked. “And I *am* better. You can *get* better. You wouldn't know anyway.”

“I came to realize,” she says, uninterested in me, “that you were never entirely there. And this was long before Ralph died, but also after.”

“But I loved you,” I say, suddenly just angry as hell. “I wanted to go on being your husband. What else from the land of truth did you want? I didn't have anything else to tell you. *That* was the truth. There's plenty about anybody you can't know and are better off not to, for Christ sake. Not that I even know what they are. There's plenty about you, stuff that doesn't even matter. Plus, where the hell was I if I wasn't there?”

“I don't know. Where you still are. Down in Haddam. I just wanted things to be clear and certain.”

“I *do* have a true heart,” I shout, and I'm tempted to give her a whack, though only on the knee. “You're one of those people who think God's *only* in the details, but then if they aren't the precise right details, life's all fucked up. You invent things that don't exist, then you worry about being denied whatever they are. And then you miss the things that *do* exist. Maybe it's you, you know? Maybe some truths don't even have words, or maybe the truth was what you wanted least, or maybe you're a woman of damn little faith. Or low self-esteem, or something."

Instead of whacking her knee, I simply take my hand off of it, unwilling now to be her consoler.

"We don't really need to go into this."

"You started it! You just wanted something else, that's all. Something beyond what there is." She's right, of course, that we shouldn't go on with this, since this is an argument any two humans can have, could have, have had, no doubt are having at this moment all over the country to properly inaugurate the holiday fun. It really has nothing to do with the two of us. In a sense, we don't even exist, taken together.

I look around at the long porch, the great blue house on its big lawn, the shimmering windows behind which my two children are imprisoned, possibly lost to me.

Ann just shakes her head again, without words accompanying. She eases herself down off the porch rail, lifts her chin, runs one finger from her temple back through her hair, and takes a quick look at the mirror window as if she saw someone coming—which she does: our son, Paul. Finally.

"I'm sorry," I say. "I'm sorry I drove you crazy when we were married. If I'd known I was going to, I wouldn't ever have married you. You're probably right, I rely on how I make things seem. It's my problem."

"I thought you thought how I thought," she says softly. "Maybe that's mine."

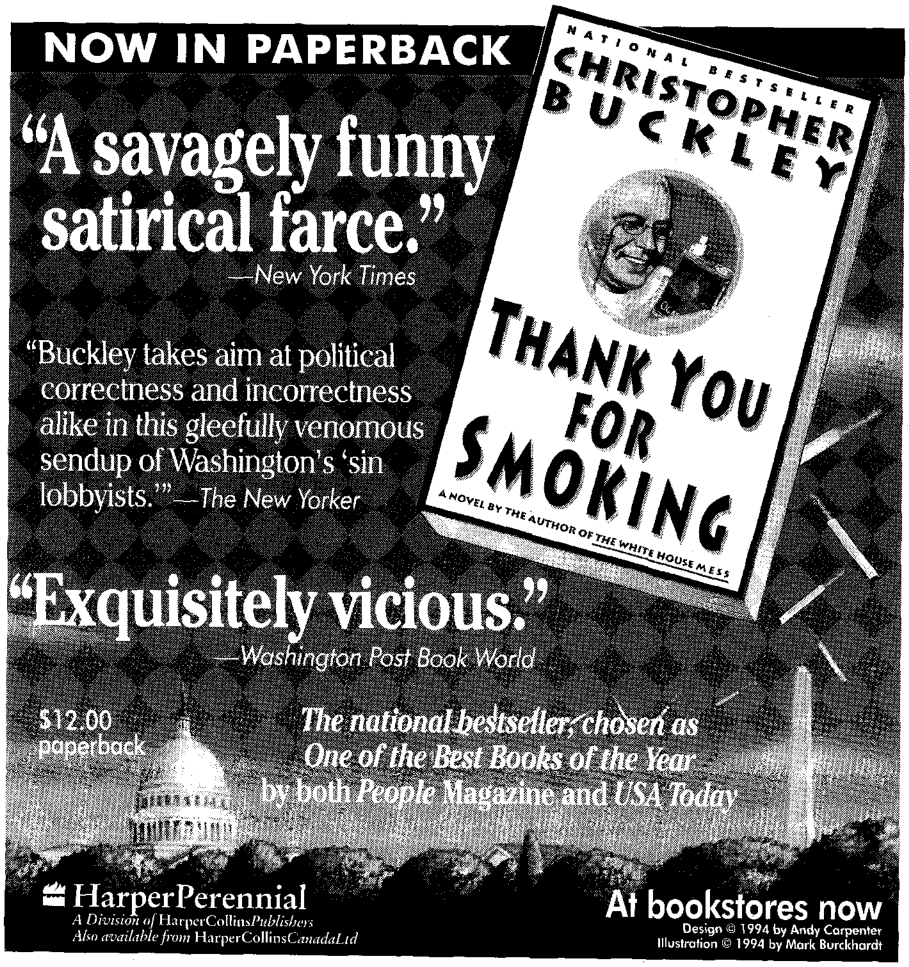
"I tried. I should've. I loved you very much all the time."

"Some things just can't be fixed later, can they?"

"No, not later," I say. "Not later they can't."

And that is essentially and finally that.

"WHY the long face?" Paul says to his mother, and also to me. He has arrived, smirking, on the porch, looking as committed to bad luck as a death-row convict. And to my surprise he's even pudgier and somehow taller, with thick, adult eyebrows even more like his mom's, but with a bad, pasty complexion—nothing like he looked as



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recently as a month ago, and not enough anymore like the small, gullible boy who kept pigeons at his home in Haddam. (How do these things change so fast?) His hair has been cut in some new, dopey, skint-sided, buzzed-up way, so that his busted ear is evident in its bloody little bandage. Plus his gait is a new big-shoe, pigeon-toed, heel-scrape, shoulder-slump sidle by which he seems to give human shape to the abstract concept of condescending disapproval for everything in sight (the effects of stress, no doubt). He simply stands before us now—his parents—doing nothing.

“I thought of a good homonym while I was getting dressed,” he says slyly, to either or both of us. “Meatier and meteor. Only they mean the same thing.” He smirks, wishing to do nothing out here more than present himself in a way we won’t like, as someone who’s lost I.Q. points, or might be considering it.

“We were just discussing you,” I say. I am, in fact, sorry to see him.

His mother, however, steps right up to him—essentially ignoring him and me—and grips his chin with her strong golfer’s thumb and index finger and turns his head to examine his split ear. (He is nearly her height.) Paul is carrying a black gym bag with “Paramount Pictures—Reach your Peak” stencilled on its side in white, and is wearing big black-and-red clunker Reeboks with silver lightning bolts on the sides, long and baggy black shorts, and a long midnight-blue T-shirt that has “Happiness Is Being Single” printed on the front below a painting of a bright red Corvette. He is a boy you can read, though he also is someone you’d be sorry to encounter on a city street. Or in your home.

Ann asks him in a private voice if he has what he needs (he has), if he has money (he does), if he feels all right (no answer). He cuts his knifey eyes at me and screws up one side of his mouth as if we’re somehow in league against her. (We aren’t.)

Then Ann abruptly says, “So, O.K., you don’t look great, but go wait in the car, please. I want to have a word with your father.”

Paul wrinkles his mouth into a mirthless little all-knowing look of scorn having to do with the very notion of his mother talking to his father. He has become a smirker by nature. But how? When?

“What happened to your ear, by the way?” I say, knowing what happened.

“I punished it,” he says. “It heard a bunch of things I didn’t like.” He says this in a mechanistic monotone. I give him a little push in the direction he’s come from, back through the house and out toward the car. And so he goes.

“I’d appreciate it if you’d try to be careful with him,” Ann says. “I want him back in good shape for his court appearance.” She has sought to lead me the way Paul has gone, “back through,” but I’m having no part of her sinister house beautiful, with its poisonous élan, spiffy lines, and bloodless color scheme. I lead us (I’m still, inexplicably, limping) down the steps to the lawn and around via the safer grass and past the shrubbery to the pea-gravel car yard, just the way a yardman would. “I think he’s injury prone,” she says quietly, following me. “I had a dream about him having an accident.”

I step in between the green-leafed, thick-smelling hydrangeas, blooming a vivid purple. “My dreams are always like the six-o’clock news,” I say. “Everything happening to other people.” The sexual whirr I experienced on seeing Ann is now long gone.

“That’s fine about your dreams,” she says, hands in pockets. “This one happened to be mine.”

I don’t wish to think about terrible injury. “He’s gotten fat,” I say. “Is he on mood stabilizers or neuro-blockers or something?”

Paul and Clarissa are already conferring by the car. She is smaller, and holding his left wrist in both her hands and trying to raise it to the top of her head in some kind of sisterly trick he’s not coöperating with. “Come *on!*” I hear her say. “You putz!”

Ann says, “He’s not on anything. He’s just growing up.” Across the gravel lot is a robust five-bay garage that matches the house in every loving detail, including the miniature copper weathervane milled into the shape of a squash racquet. Two bay doors are open and two Mercedes with “Constitution State” plates are nosed into the shadows. I wonder where Paul’s station wagon is. “Dr. Stopler said he displays qualities of an only child, which is too bad, in a way.”

“I was an only child. I liked it.”

“He’s just *not* one. Dr. Stopler also said”—she’s ignoring me, and why shouldn’t she?—“not to talk to him too much about current events. They cause anxiety.”

“I guess they do,” I say. I am ready to say something caustic about childhood to steal my proprietorship of this day—revive Wittgenstein about living in the present meaning to live forever, blah, blah, blah. But I simply call a halt. No good’s to come. All boats fall on a bitter tide—children know it better than anyone. “Do you think you know what’s making him worse just all of a sudden?”

She shakes her head, grips her right wrist with her left hand and twists the two together, then gives me a small, bleak smile. “You and me, I guess. What else?”

“I guess I was wanting a more complicated answer.”

“Well, good for you.” She rubs her other wrist the same way. “I’m sure you’ll think of one.”

“Maybe I’ll have put on my tombstone: ‘He expected a more complicated answer.’ ”

“Let’s quit talking about this, O.K.?” She looks at me in a nose-wrinkled way and slouches a shoulder. She has not meant to be so harsh.

Ann, amongst the hydrangeas, for the first time today looks purely beautiful—pretty enough for me to exhale, for my mind to open outward, and for me to gaze at her in a way I once gazed at her all the time, every single day of our old life together in Haddam. Now would be the perfect moment for a future-refashioning kiss, or for her to tell me she’s dying of leukemia, or for me to tell her I am. But that doesn’t happen. She is smiling her stalwart smile now, one that’s long since been disappointed and can face most anything if need be—lies, lies, and more lies.

“You two have a good time,” she says. “And please be careful with him.”

“He’s my son,” I say idiotically.

“Oh, I know that. He’s just like you.” And then she turns and walks back toward the yard, continuing on, I suspect, out of sight and down to the water to have her lunch with her husband. ♦

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RHYME AND UNREASON

Why Edward Lear is the complete Victorian.

BY ANTHONY LANE

On the evening of January 2, 1865, Edward Lear was escorted home by a couple of new acquaintances. "Nothing could exceed the genteel & intelligent expression of their countenances, except the urbanity of their deportment and the melancholy and oblivious sweetness of their voices," he wrote in a letter. They sound delightful, and it comes as no surprise to learn that the relationship did not end there: the well-bred pair dropped by to see him some days later, bringing with them their two eldest children, whom Lear put into the washbasin. Harsh treatment, you might think, although it's worth bearing in mind that the friends in question were, in fact, frogs. "They informed me," he wrote, "that they were the parents of nine and forty tadpoles of various ages and talents some of whom were expecting shortly to emigrate to Malvern and Mesopotamia."

The more we learn about Edward Lear, the less alarmed we should be by such unorthodox virtues as politeness in the presence of pond life. The barely schooled child became a full-time wanderer, perpetually unsatisfied, and, later, an elderly expert on disappointment. Poet, painter, friend of Tennyson; cat companion, composer, clergy-mocking liberal; longtime lover of Greece but not, it seems, of anyone else; purveyor of majestic canvases to the aristocracy and of utter nonsense to generations of children; epileptic, myopic, bronchitic, nostalgic Lear, born in 1812 and dying in 1888: how graciously he rises to greet us as the complete Victorian. This is not, one hastens to add, because he fulfilled all the era's aspirations but precisely because he left half of them unfulfilled, under the gentle pressure of doubt, the great counterenergy of the time. "Is there not a brutal balance to all satisfactions?" he once asked, already knowing the answer.

Something strange has happened to Lear's reputation in recent years: strands of it have split off and peeled away from the rest. Most people, if they know anything about him at all, think of Lear as the man who wrote "The Owl and the Pussy-Cat" and scores of limericks—none of which are remotely dirty or, indeed, very funny, although they have a habit of getting their claws into your memory and never shaking free. In this view of things, Lear remains a crowd pleaser, and the crowd is composed almost entirely of children. I happen to agree with this view—or, at least, I reckon that it remains the best point from which to start your travels into the world of Lear, even if it eventually leads you into sobering and unquestionably adult terrain.

It is now considered rather simple-minded, however, to admire Lear the children's writer, for Lear the artist is riding high. These days, his oils and watercolors fetch alarming prices at auction, and Lear experts have followed the fashion. His formidable skills were self-taught: his professional training was limited to an abortive patch in 1850 at the Royal Academy, during which he supported himself on a five-hundred-pound bequest from a family friend. That was his only private income; in order to survive, a Victorian painter needed wealthy patrons. In his late teens, Lear was introduced to Lord Egremont, the admirer of Turner. To Lear he was less encouraging—"But where is all this going to lead to, Mr. Lear?" he inquired, and it remains a good question. Yet one Lord led to another, as lords do, and in 1846 Lear dedicated his "Illustrated Excursions in Italy" to Lord Derby. When Queen Victoria saw the work, she requested a dozen drawing lessons from the author, and appeared both to enjoy his company and to copy his draftsman's style. Lear, in turn, was amazed by some of the Queen's treasures. "I say, where did you get these?" he asked her. "I inherited them, Mr. Lear," she replied. Although Lear knew plenty of posh people, he was seldom locked into their circle; they, in turn, were amused by his unwillingness to be poshed up, so to speak, by their example. You could hardly call him a social climber—nobody who could drop off the ladder and go to ground, as Lear did so readily, could be accused of self-advancement. His career followed not so much a trajectory as an itinerary; he rambled from one friend to the next, from Greece to Asia Minor, from painting to verse and back again.

In his new book, "Edward Lear: A Biography" (Scribner; $30), Peter Levi declares his priorities at the start: "Lear was professionally and, I think, essentially a painter." Ah yes, the essence: the grail of modern biography, a secret vial that, once uncorked and sniffed, will release the true nature of the subject. But with Lear, as with any great Victorian, we need to think in terms not of essence but of expanse. In his lifetime, he published five books of nonsense, seven of travel, and three of natural history. In all he did, it is true, there is a kind of sigh: a comic, domesticated version of the "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar" that the more high-minded Matthew Arnold heard on Dover Beach. But Lear did so much; he covered such a range of tones. For every murmur of Arnold, there is an alliterative glee that smacks of Gilbert & Sullivan. Wherever you look, in the poems and the letters, in the watercolors and the cartoons, you catch a familiar downcast wit—that truest form of wit, which, by an unfakable reflex of the imagination, sees the other side of everything. Not just the funny side: there can be something witty in the well-timed glance at mortality. "I can't decide in my mind," Lear wrote in Cannes in 1868, "if it is wiser to wait death in one spot, making the spot as pleasant as may be, and varying its monotony by such pleasant gleams of older life as can be obtained, or—to hurry on through constantly new and burningly bright scenes, and then dying all improviso as may happen." The indecision kept him on his toes; it was, you might say, a practical species of wit that led Lear to set off over the horizon with such regular obsessiveness. A simple chronology of his life is hectic with visits to Rome, Calabria, Corsica, Sicily, Sinai, Suez, Albania, Malta, Corfu, Crete, India, and Ceylon. He finally built a house in San Remo, and died there, with what he called "the pulled blue of the sea breaking beyond."

Peter Levi's book is only the latest attempt to sort through the strange case of Edward Lear. Levi should be the

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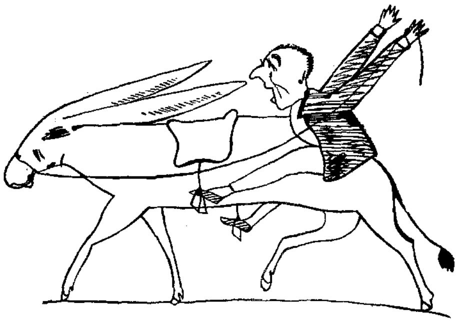
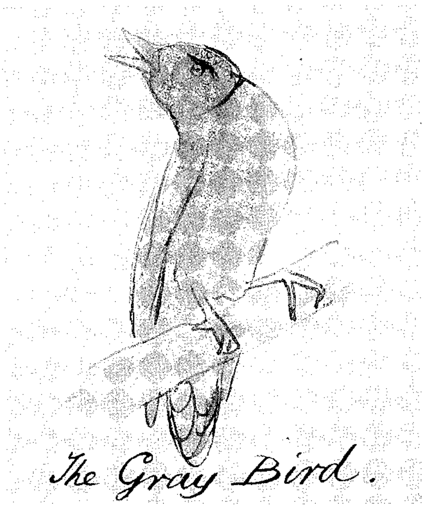


There was an Old Man of Madras,
Who rode on a cream-coloured Ass;
But the length of its ears so promoted his fears,
That it killed that Old Man of Madras.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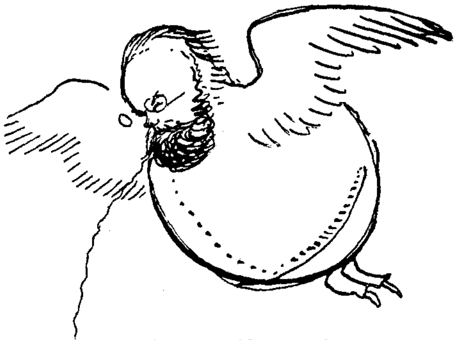

Lear's self-portrait on a note
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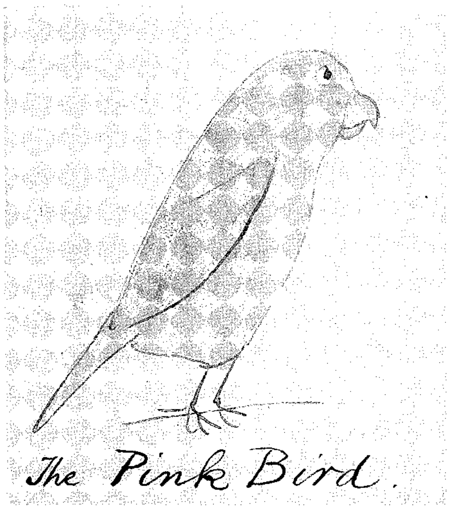
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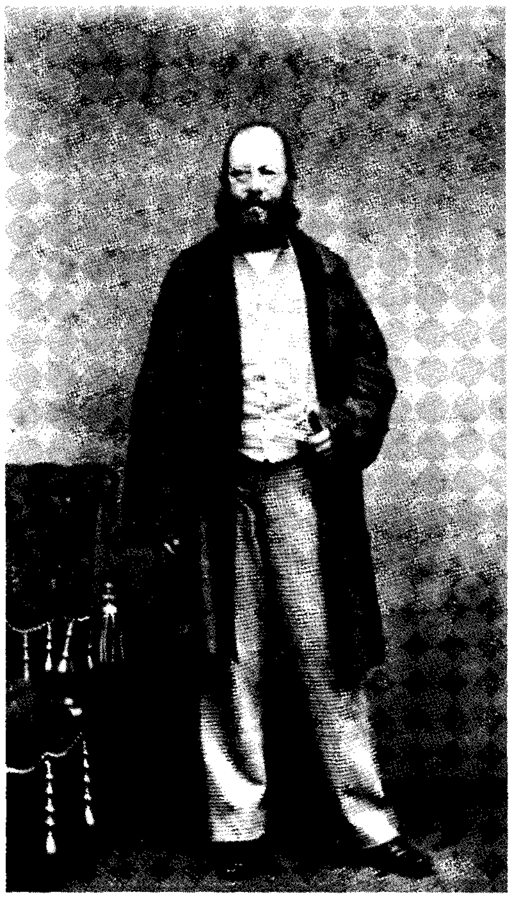
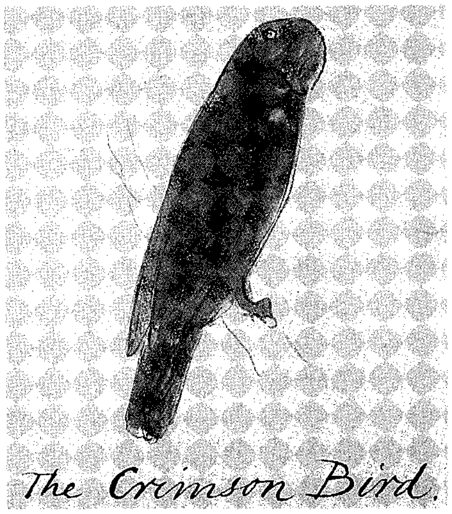


Lear in an 1862 portrait on his calling card.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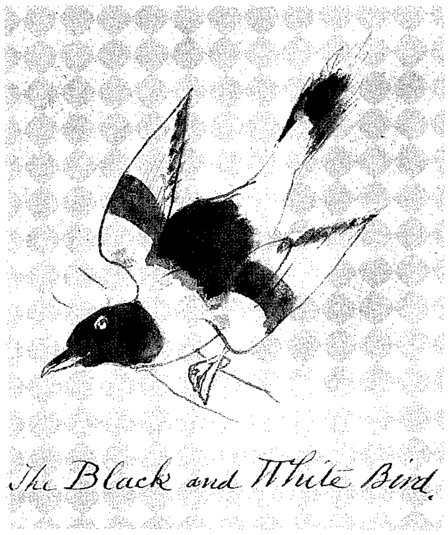
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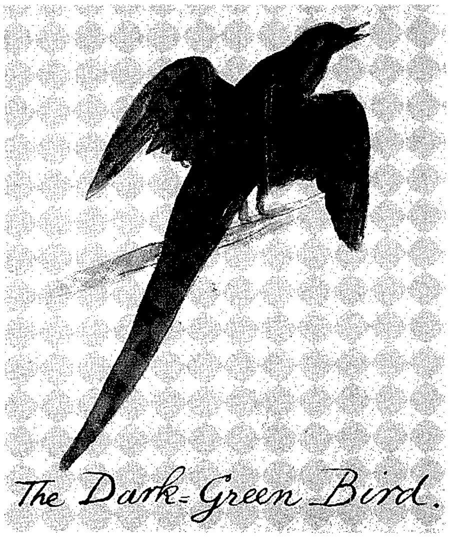
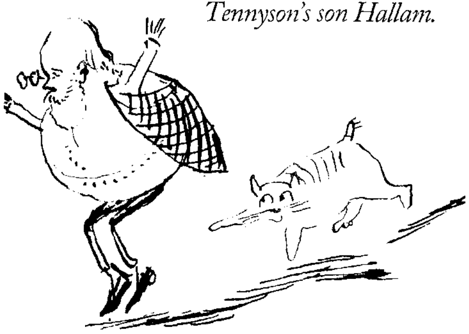
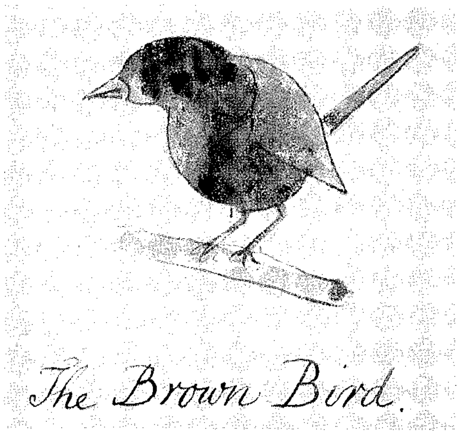

The Dark-Green Bird.

Six bird watercolors from a set of sixteen
which Lear made in 1880; self-portrait,
below, from an 1885 letter to Alfred
Tennyson's son Hallam.

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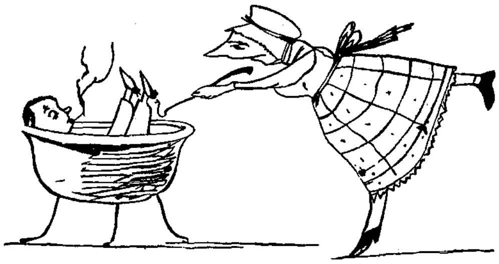


There was an Old Man of the North,
Who fell into a basin of broth;
But a laudable cook fished him out with a hook,
Which saved that Old Man of the North.

ideal sleuth: he is a classicist and a poet, he has travelled as widely as his subject did, and his former incarnations include Jesuit priest and Professor of Poetry at Oxford. All of which make it rather a pity that this new book proceeds in such an eager, ramshackle style—somewhere between a prance and a ramble, descending at times into a parody of dotty donnishness. In discussing the illustrated alphabets that Lear produced for children, Levi writes, "I have the impression that I have not described all the alphabets I ever saw. I do not think I ever saw Gertrude Lushington's (c. 1860) mounted in a rag-book, though it is at Harvard, but I do recollect one published by Rota in 1968 which I have lost or given away." You could argue, of course, that this hither-and-thither prose ("His Arabic, like mine, is far from perfect," he remarks of Lear in passing) has a fitting charm; that Lear, with his connoisseur's palate for oddity, would have appreciated the shameless way in which Levi arrives at afterthoughts without appearing to go via thoughts. But Lear courted surprise, and he knew early that vagueness is the enemy of nonsense; his lyrics and limericks obey rules—laws of unnature, as it were—that he alone seems to understand, but they are rules nonetheless. "It is a sine quâ non in writing for children to keep what they have to read perfectly clear & bright, & incapable of any meaning but one of sheer nonsense," he wrote.

Levi's book is bright enough, but far from clear. He trips from fact to supposition without any principle to guide him, and there are moments when his prodigious knowledge sours into a kind of historical knowingness, a presumption that one can be chummy with the not so recent past. From there, it is only a short step to real blunders of taste: "Lady Waldegrave now had almost everything that as a Jewish musician's daughter she can ever have wanted," he writes, referring to the new wife of one of Lear's friends. You may have thought that such clubbable snobbery had vanished from English prose, and it is a nasty shock to find it still smirking in the corner. The shock is heightened by our certainty that Lear himself would never have conceived of a friend (Lady Waldegrave commissioned seven paintings from him) in such a way. He was never a snob or an anti-Semite or a xenophobe, and, although he journeyed to various extremes of empire, and stayed with high-ranking acquaintances, he made a hopeless imperialist. If there was anybody he looked down on, it was himself: "A dirty landscape-painter who hated his nose," as Auden put it in his poem "Edward Lear." (Of all later poets, it is Auden who most resembles Lear; thrown together on a distant shore, these two masters of the avuncular-sinister would have had a high old time.) The briefest immersion in Lear's verse and correspondence, or in the basic data of his life, is enough to convince you that he was far too deeply soaked in melancholy, in the sorrows that fate rained down upon him through the years, to dream of making things wretched for anyone else:

How pleasant to know Mr. Lear!
  Who has written such volumes of stuff!
Some think him ill-tempered and queer,
  But a few think him pleasant enough.

His mind is concrete and fastidious,
  His nose is remarkably big;
His visage is more or less hideous,
  His beard it resembles a wig.

He has ears, and two eyes, and ten fingers,
  Leastways if you reckon two thumbs;
Long ago he was one of the singers,
  But now he is one of the dumbs.

This is the opening of his poem "How Pleasant to Know Mr. Lear." Somewhere between memoir and apologia, it is a pitiless look in a mirror: it skirts both pride and self-pity to arrive at a form of comical auto-elegy whose honesty—whose simple accuracy—has rarely been equalled. It is the greatest poem of its kind since Swift's "Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift," and it convinces you, without stridency or strong-arming, that its title is perfectly true. It *would* have been pleasant to know him.

If you want to see Lear steadily and see him whole, your best plan is to leapfrog over Levi and turn to "Edward Lear: The Life of a Wanderer," by Vivien Noakes, which was first published in 1968. Mrs. Noakes is the First Lady of Lear studies; in addition to the biography, still unsurpassed, she has edited a selection of the letters, has argued the case for the art in "The Painter Edward Lear" (1991), and contributed a meticulous text to the catalogue of a Lear exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1985. Wherever you turn in Lear land, she is there to guide you and offer Virgilian advice; she is as indispensable to devotees of Lear as Richard Ellmann was, and still is, to devotees of Joyce. Next to the preciousness of Levi's book, "Edward Lear: The Life of a Wanderer" feels calmer and more unassuming than ever. It amasses the evidence, probes a few sore secrets, and weighs the probabilities; the result is one of the saddest books I have ever read—no surprise, really, for the life it reveals is so swollen with sadness that it almost makes you laugh. That is how Lear survived it, I guess.

EDWARD LEAR was the twentieth of twenty-one children. Two siblings were stillborn, five others died young; three of Lear's sisters were christened Sarah, his parents persevering until a Sarah survived. Whether the shadow of infant mortality stiffened the stoicism of Victorian families or weakened their will is impossible to know; can grief be common currency without becoming debased? Lear, for one, never staled in his response to human fragility. His upbringing was entrusted to a beloved sister, Ann, twenty-one years his senior; when she died, in 1861, he wrote in a letter, "I am all at sea:—and do not know my way an hour ahead." Like Dickens (a rival addict of the grotesque, also born in 1812), Lear had a father of unstable fortune; Levi says that the senior Lear went to a debtors' prison. The young Edward suffered bad health and worse eyesight; he devised names for the conditions that began to plague him. There were "the Morbids" or "morbidnesses," pits of depression, and then there was "the demon," his epilepsy, which began when he was five or six; Levi reports that the attacks came "up to ten or fifteen times a month, sometimes several times a day." (They are marked in Lear's journal by small crosses, like intimations of mortality.) From what is termed the aura epileptica, he could tell when they were coming, and would take appropriate action; for his entire life, Edward Lear—a sociable and popular man—continually melted away from company so as not to embarrass other people with his fits. The Dong with a luminous Nose, the Pobble who has no toes: he created a bestiary of misfits who would share his self-enforced solitude. No one outside his immediate family knew of Lear's affliction, which thus became encrusted with social anxiety and erotic dread.

Vivien Noakes politely suggests that he felt a sexual longing for a man named Franklin Lushington, with whom he toured Greece in 1849; they decorated their hats, coats, and horses with spring flowers as they went. But longing never bloomed: in Lear's mind, and in his awkward body, desires were something to be buried deep, stuffed down until they became a tangle of roots. At one point, he thought of proposing to a close friend named Gussie Bethell, but the demon drove him back. Noakes's plain account of the situation makes you weep: "She might refuse him which would be distressing, or accept him which could be worse, for he would have to tell her about his epilepsy—and then she might change her mind." And so, being Lear, he fled:

Down the slippery slopes of Myrtle,
Where the early pumpkins blow,
To the calm and silent sea
Fled the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò.

It is tempting, of course, to peel away the humor and uncover the sexual confusion that writhes beneath it; a Freudian reader, having feasted on "Alice in Wonderland" to his heart's content (the rabbit hole, the prim young lady holding a flamingo), can turn with glee to the outsized appendages that litter the pages of another repressive. How pleasant to solve Mr. Lear! It takes no stretch of the imagination to decide that the Dong with the luminous Nose was dreamed up by a lonely bachelor with a nose for luminous dongs.

But Lear's own imagination did stretch, far beyond the mere displacement of lust, and we should try to go the distance with him. From our earliest encounters with his work, we sense something amiss, a certain squeezing and wringing of the spirit. Readers fresh to Lear—children, say, or parents reading to children—may pause for thought even at the most innocuous moments:

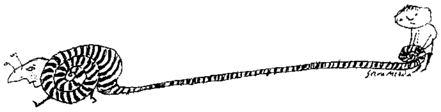
O was an oyster
Who lived in his shell
If you let him alone
He felt perfectly well.

This chant is so quick and slight that it's easy to miss the emotion that leaks between the lines. Who but Lear would have considered an oyster not as a food, an aphrodisiac, or a gritty producer of pearls but as the epitome of independence? His writings are ruffled by a continual suspicion that it would be interesting to be other than you are; that the life assigned to your present species is so intrinsically discomforting that, rather than try to improve it by human means, you would do better to slip into the skin and soul of another creature altogether. Here is Lear on the inhabitants of the moon:

> From the tip of their nose depends an elegant and affecting bunch of hair, sometimes extending to as much as 20 miles in length, & as it is considered sacrilegious to cut it, it is gradually wound round a silvergilt post firmly placed in the ground, but removable at pleasure. . . . These remarkable people, so unlike ourselves, pass 18 months of their year (which consists of 22,) in the strictest seclusion,—suspended with their heads downwards, and held carefully in crimson silk bags,—which are severely suddenly shaken from time to time by select servants. Thus,—exempt from the futile fluctuating fatuity of fashion, these estimable creatures pass an indigenous life of indefinite duration surrounded by their admiring ancestors, & despised by their incipient posterity.

The tone is one of firsthand observation—pornographically precise, and undeniably covetous. Lear is not alone in his yearning. "Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats," for all its charm, seems to me suffused with something close to genuine envy: "Macavity's not there," Eliot says, with the smiling desperation of a man who has had to spend his time *right here*. And you often feel that James Thurber would have enjoyed existence more as an adored dog than as a bewildered human being.

Like Thurber, Lear was doubly gifted, or cursed: he could both write down and draw the particulars of transformation. He had a monkish genius for marginalia, and, to the delight of his correspondents, he used to illustrate his own letters, often with self-portraits. The Lear whom we see there cuts an absurdly vulnerable figure: a bearded puffball, the shape of a sparrow in winter, graced with a putto's wings or tottering on twig legs, spectacles jumping with shock from his nose. In one instance, his tailcoat looks exactly like the hard shell of a bug; it would have stopped Kafka in his tracks. These, like the illustrations that enliven the limericks, are still the images by which he is best known, if no longer those for which he is most honored. The main thrust of recent Lear studies has been to turn our attention to the serious—or, at any rate, professional—art. Most of it was scenic; Lear ("the globular foolish Topographer" is how he once signed a letter) sketched incessantly on his travels through southern Europe, the Middle East, and India, and there is a fine air of restraint, of beauty reached for but not quite remembered, in his pencil-and-wash landscapes. Even those which have been completed look unfinished, and that dashed-off quality appeals to modern tastes. What people see in his glossy, overfinished oils (some of them close to the thundering vistas of John Martin) I have never really grasped.



If I could own a single item of Lear's art, it would be an early drawing of a parrot—Lear used to visit the Zoological Society Gardens, and his first publication was "Illustrations of the Family of Psittacidæ, or Parrots"—that appears on a page of his sketchbook. An exquisitely rendered bird stares down at an unexpected visitor: a short, round, roughly drawn man with hands in pockets, who seems to have wandered in from a different picture, or from another world. It is Lear, staring back at the parrot. He directs his formidable skills to recording nature as it truly is, but, damn it all, something silly—nature as it shouldn't be, if it would only behave itself properly—keeps creeping in. Lear is a helpless victim of the aura fantastica. Who else (apart from Dickens, perhaps) could listen to the clacking bills of storks and fancy that he heard the sound of backgammon?

It is when I come across a detail like that—a brief, half-hallucinated flare of perceptions striking against one another—that I feel most at odds with Peter Levi's opening argument. Lear is *not* essentially a painter. His delicate draftsmanship answers to Victorian visual tastes, and refines them; but it lacks the vigorous complication of his nonsense writing, which challenges those tastes as much as it delights them, pulling them into squalls and doldrums of feeling where they would otherwise never go. The passage about life on the moon comes from a letter of 1882, written not to a child but to the Honorable Mrs. James Stuart-Wortley, who sounds about as respectable as it is possible to be, and who, indeed, was married to Palmerston's Solicitor General; Lear flatters her by assuming that, far below the surface of her manners, she can still respond as a child, that for a few private minutes she can unlearn the lessons of her age. In the boldness of that assumption we glimpse an abiding truth: without Victorian nonsense, we cannot hope to understand Victorian sense—not just good sense or common sense but the mechanisms by which writers and travellers tried to make sense of the world, and the variety of prejudices that they disclosed in the attempt. "Through the Looking-Glass" is an outrageous companion piece to "The Voyage of the Beagle": both books are egged on by the conviction that wonder is all very well but brisk inquisition is better. If Carroll takes a stand in the face of illogicality, Lear takes wing; he flies in the shadow of his old friend Tennyson. "I am aweary, aweary, / I would that I were dead," says Tennyson's Mariana, a refrain that filters through to Lear's Yonghy-Bonghy-Bò ("I'm a-weary of my life") and to the unbearable straightforwardness of an early limerick:

There was an Old Man of Cape Horn,
Who wished he had never been born;
So he sat on a chair, till he died of despair,
That dolorous Man of Cape Horn.

Lear set Tennyson's verse to music, and was commissioned to paint scenes from the poems, but what links the two men unbreakably is the *sound* of their common regret—the long, moaning vowels both of the Lotos-Eaters, who came to a land where it seemed always afternoon, and of the Jumblies, who went to sea in a sieve. Tennyson draws out the solemn euphony in Lear, and Lear, in turn, reminds us just how daringly the Laureate himself brushed against nonsense. "I really do believe that I enjoy hardly any one thing on earth while it is present: always looking back, or frettingly peering into the dim beyond." That is Lear talking, but it could equally be Tennyson, or the idyll of a dying king.

How angry was Edward Lear? Did he sometimes wish that, like Alice, he could grab hold of the starchy tablecloth and pull? I sense an immaculate balance in him: the horror of being abandoned with his single self versus a fear of losing it in the bustle of society. Like another dolorous man of the time, Edward FitzGerald, Lear was a loner who specialized in friends. After a trip to Mt. Athos, he expressed hearty disapproval of the "muttering, miserable, muttonhating, manavoiding, misogynic, morose, & merriment-marring, monotoning, many-Mule-making, mocking, mournful, mincedfish & marmalade masticating Monx." It's an endearing broadside; even his contempt is ringed with jollity, perhaps because he was scaring away the forces of misery and marring that prowled about his own life. He once wrote a story entitled "The History of the Seven Families of the Lake Pipple-popple," in which the heroes—a frog, a flea, and so on—return home "full of joy and respect, sympathy, satisfaction, and disgust." That was the brew, I suspect, that brimmed Lear's own heart; the disgust never drained away, but he was too shy to do much about it. In his whimsical fractures of social convention we see just how rigorous that convention must have been, how efficiently it could take the whimsy in its stride and leave it behind:

There was an Old Man of Whitehaven,
Who danced a quadrille with a Raven;
But they said—"It's absurd, to encourage this bird!"
So they smashed that Old Man of Whitehaven.

The violence of the final line brings you up short; the old man is treated like a piece of glass, as if people had seen through his motives and judged him guilty. (The bird, presumably, was an innocent, lured into his dance like a child.) Who are "they," though? "But they said" and "When they said": in these brief, recurrent phrases you hear the moral leitmotiv of the limericks. It is the ruthless, anonymous voice of public opinion, suspicious of novelty, reluctant to allow these bulbous, elastic eccentrics the one thing that they ask for, which is the privilege of being alone.

By the end, Lear enjoyed the privilege all too well. He died in San Remo in January of 1888, cared for by an Italian servant; only two English friends made it to the funeral. Foss, his companionable cat, had died two months earlier, so Lear had little to live for. He was smashed beyond repair. Peter Levi quotes the final diary entry: "A beefsteak mascherato. Good in its way but nasty more. I should try to get some sleep if possible, but I have no light or life left in me. And the flies are as horrible as ever." There was never a time when Lear was not bothered; he was granted the gift of making other people happy, both in person and in the buoyancy of his work, but was denied the chance to be happy himself. It is the lousiest of deals, and countless writers have signed up for it; all we can do to palliate their pain is to keep reading. Edward Lear, by his own admission, was one of the dumbs, and his biographers make it clear that he was the leading light of the sads. But now he is one of the singers again, and his voice grows stronger all the time. ♦

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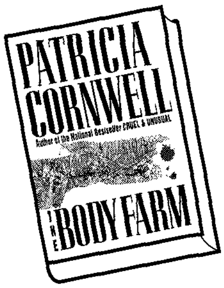

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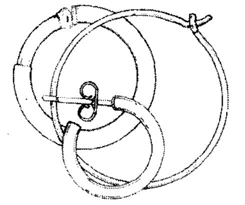
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BY JOHN UPDIKE

Thomas Hine

ISADORE SELTZER

THOMAS HINE, the author of the excellent "Populuxe" (1986), in his new book, "The Total Package" (Little, Brown; $24.95), has bitten off more than anyone was ever meant to chew. Hine, the architecture and design critic for the Philadelphia *Inquirer*, brings us the history of packages and containers, from a five-thousand-year-old urn, found in western Iran and containing sediments of ancient beer, up to the nineteen-nineties issues of nutrition-fact labelling and empties disposal. En route, scarcely a psychosociological stone is left unturned: the package's various roles as food preserver, shipping container, advertising placard, and hidden persuader are all explored, not without some doubling back over already tramped ground. "Populuxe," another prodigious marshalling of old advertisements and consumption statistics, focussed on the United States between 1954 and 1964 and poignantly illumined an era that most of the book's readers had rather blindly lived through. Hine coined a memorable word for a racy, splashy stylistic mood of cheap luxury mass-produced for a generation of hopeful nouveaux riches; his sympathetic grasp of, say, the social logic of the Tupperware party or the affinity between the potato chip's "free-form" shape and the "double-curving furniture of Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen" showed what a mischievously alert sensibility could make of vulgar forms usually kept outside the pale of serious consideration.

Much of the aerodynamic blare of Populuxe was called into being by the new mobility and impersonality of American life; if "The Total Package" has a dominant theme, it is the package as a substitute person in a world where the farmer, the butcher, the grocer, and even the salesclerk have been relegated to the back shelves. The package inspires trust, with its sealed and unvarying product, as "ties of family and community" fray. Hine asserts that the Romans had at least one brand-name product, the Fortis oil-burning lamp, and extolls the medieval reliquary and the synagogue ark as symbolically potent containers, but dates modern packaging from the seventeenth-century emergence of English patent medicines—Stoughton's Drops, Singleton's eye ointment, Turlington's Original Balsam, each brand offered in its own eye-catching shape of bottle. The names on these nostrums and the wealth of promises on their thickly printed labels aped the personal attentions of a medical practitioner. In this country, Indians, Shakers, and Quakers were associated with herbal remedies, and the first great triumph of mass-marketing in a paper box, Henry Parson Crowell's Quaker Oats, continues to sell, more than a century after its introduction, with the Quaker on the box a shade jollier but essentially unchanged. Aunt Jemima pancake mix dates from the eighteen-nineties, and she anachronistically survives from an era when, as Hine writes, "racist images, and others that reflected ethnic stereotypes, provided products with personalities that were apparently unthreatening. They were a kind of servant just about anyone could afford."

Package design, striving for a continuous relation with the consumer, tends to be conservative: Wrigley's Spearmint gum, the Hershey bar, and (until last year) Campbell's soup have only slightly modified the bold and simple designs hit upon by their first promoters. Coca-Cola, though driven by economic considerations to cans, seeks to maintain, through reminiscent elements in its logo, a ghostly connection with its iconic bottle. Millions of dollars ride on nuances of design. Hine recounts the saga of two new mouthwashes introduced in the nineteen-sixties. Johnson & Johnson came out with a blue fluid called Micrin, in a plastic bottle that evoked an old-fashioned medical jar. It quickly faded, because, according to Hine, "it conveyed the message that bad breath is a medical problem that must be banished in a medicinal way. It was a variation of the Listerine approach . . . but without the weight of tradition behind it." At the same time, Procter & Gamble succeeded with Scope, a green fluid in a flattened conical container. Hine explains, "Its color and its almost playful shape suggested that bad breath is part of life, and Scope helps." Yet Listerine continues to sell in a plastic version of its waisted, solemnly therapeutic bottle.

Hine's take on modern designers is rather negative: many packages that photograph beautifully and win prizes don't move the product off the shelves; the most creative hold "characterless" and hard-to-distinguish products like springwater, vodka, and skin cream; and "while as recently as thirty years ago many products were in the hands of strong-willed proprietors who viewed packaging as an expression of themselves, today nearly all are in the hands of managers driven by fear of a career-ending mistake." Zealous surveys and gurus of psychological marketing like Stan Gross assiduously cater to the psyches of imagined consumers, whereas the early entrepreneurs, awash in ego strength, put their own faces, or images of their factories, on their labels, and lettered them with whatever typefaces the local printer had lying about in his trays.

WHEN Hine discusses specific packages and technological advances—the paper bag, the shopping cart, cellophane—he is interesting; when he generalizes, a certain mind-numbing think-tank-speak begins to amplify the obvious:

> Seemingly nondesign issues having to do with materials, permeability, protection, expected shelf life, and even the expected cleanliness standards of the retail environ-

> ment end up having a very strong influence over how the products look. The type of container chosen and the technology used to fill it have an obvious impact on costs, which require that detailed budgeting be a prerequisite for package design.

And the application of hi-crit lingo to our humble friends the packages takes some getting used to:

> Thus, the shopper can choose between Tide, whose package was designed to signal that it was powerful yet mild, and Cheer, whose image is mild, yet powerful.
>
> The use of the large-scale element on the very small package [of Wrigley's Spearmint gum] gives it a sense of pent-up energy, which is enhanced by the directionality and dynamism of the arrow itself.

The illustrations are rather meagre, confined to three bound-in sheaves, only one of them in color. "Populuxe" was a much more opulent and graphically lively book, as well as less thematically diffuse. Explaining the years 1954-64 to readers in 1986 was a nervier, more spirited enterprise than surveying packaging in its sprawling totality. (Not that Hine says everything worth saying: he goes on about the visual appeal of packages but says little of their tactile appeal—the inviting fleshy feel, for instance, of such successful packages as the old cellophane-wrapped paper cigarette pack and the matte plastic squeeze bottle—and he ignores the large role that emptied packages, such as orange crates, cigar boxes, and pipe-tobacco tins, once had in the play lives of American children.)

Packages, according to Hine, want to be our friends and by and large succeed. They have dramatically reduced the amount of time spent in food preparation, and the cost of food relative to the income of an urban family. They even, surprisingly, abet conservation: "Capital-intensive American farming gets more than twice as much food per unit of fossil fuels than does labor-intensive China, largely because of packaging that keeps food from spoiling on the way to the consumer." On the hot issue of package disposal he is as melioristic as an Alcoa commercial. Cans and plastic containers are getting thinner all the time, and even now take up less space than anybody thinks—less than demolition and construction debris, for instance. We do learn, however, that Staten Island's mountainous, New York City-fed Fresh Kills landfill is "the second-largest human-made structure in the world, surpassed only by the Great Wall of China."

Are packages undermining our humanity? Hine concludes by recounting how his ill mother rejected his homemade-pot-roast recipe and her sister's stew in favor of ready-mixed products, and decides that his "mother's devotion to packaged products was . . . ultimately . . . a gift. It gave me permission to leave. . . . It let us both be independent." Along the same lines, self-service supermarkets remove the "demanding" "personal interaction" of customer and salesclerk, which requires a "kind of emotional intensity that most people would rather not lavish on a trivial purchase." Farther along the same lines, James Kaplan, puzzling in a recent *New York* over why his generation is less adulterous than his parents', came to the arresting conclusion that, raised on television and able to rent videos at will, he and his peers are so fully entertained that it is just too much effort to get to know their neighbors well enough to sleep with them. The safe, packaged experience of videos has rendered the sexual demon obsolete. Next thing, babies will come bubble-wrapped. ♦

SOME LAST WORDS

1.

It is easier for a needle to pass through a camel
Than for a poor man to enter a woman of means.
Just go to the graveyard and ask around.

2.

Eventually, you slip outside, letting the door
Bang shut on your latest thought. What was it, anyway?
Just go to the graveyard and ask around.

3.

Negligence is the perfume I love.
O Fedora. Fedora. If you want any,
Just go to the graveyard and ask around.

4.

The bones of the buffalo, the rabbit at sunset,
The wind and its double, the tree, the town . . .
Just go to the graveyard and ask around.

5.

If you think good things are on their way
And the world will improve, don't hold your breath.
Just go to the graveyard and ask around.

6.

You over there, why do you ask if this is the valley
Of limitless blue, and if we are its prisoners?
Just go to the graveyard and ask around.

7.

Life is a dream that is never recalled when the sleeper awakes.
If this is beyond you, Magnificent One,
Just go to the graveyard and ask around.

—Mark Strand

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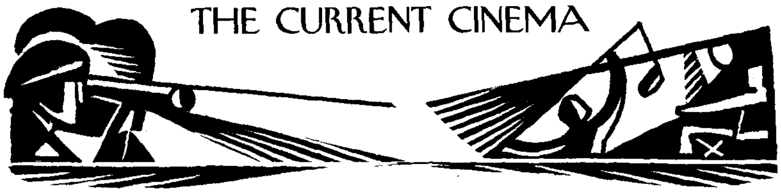


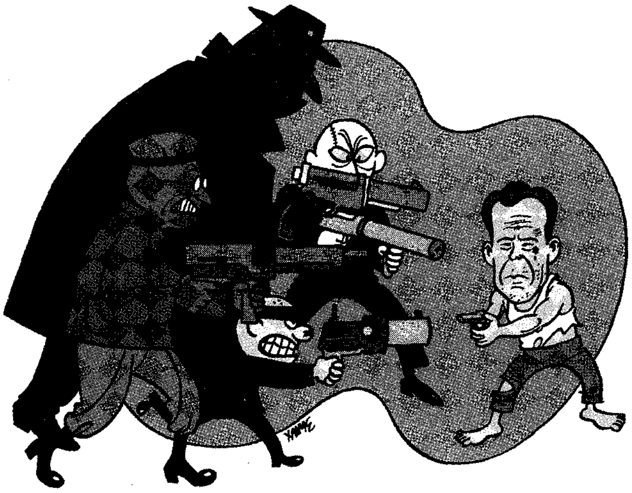
THE AVENGERS

"Die Hard with a Vengeance" and "A Little Princess."

BY TERRENCE RAFFERTY

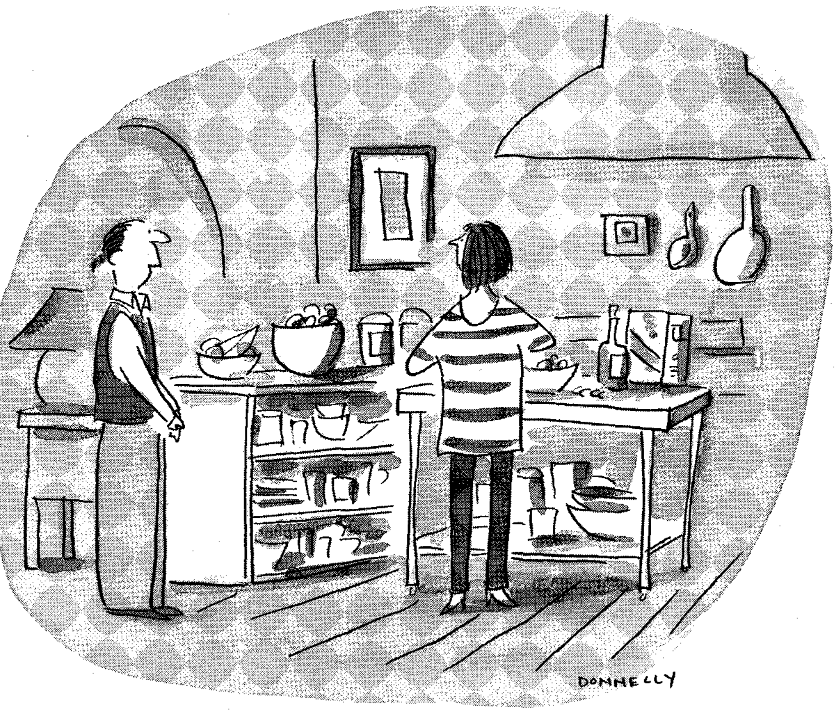
In the first scene of John McTiernan's "Die Hard with a Vengeance," a New York City department store blows up at the height of the morning rush. That's this movie's way of saying hello. For the next hour or so, the scruffy police detective John McClane (Bruce Willis)—the hero of the two previous "Die Hard" adventures—dashes around the city trying to head off further explosions that have been threatened by a mysterious, German-accented caller. The ostensibly mad bomber, who identifies himself only as Simon, subjects the hung-over cop to a series of Simon-says tests: if McClane, zipping breathlessly from pay phone to pay phone, fails to solve one of Simon's riddles or to perform one of the fiendishly tricky tasks that the caller has devised, something else, or perhaps McClane himself, will get blown to kingdom come. By the time McClane, the human pinball, figures out that Simon's game is actually an elaborate diversion, an awful lot of frantic action has taken place: the hero has barely escaped being killed by an angry gang in Harlem; he has sprinted, in a commandeered cab, from the Upper West Side to below Fourteenth Street and then leaped from a sidewalk grate onto the roof of a moving subway train; a bomb has gone off in a tunnel under Wall Street; Simon has announced that he has planted an explosive device in a public school, and, since he hasn't said which school, the cops have decided to search all of them. In this chaotic atmosphere, Simon (revealed, at last, as Jeremy Irons, sporting a short haircut and a thin, superior smile) has led a band of German mercenaries into the vault of the Federal Reserve Bank and made off with several billion dollars' worth of gold.

That's this movie's idea of foreplay. The audience, knowing that all the spectacular action in the first half of "Die Hard with a Vengeance" is just the filmmakers' way of getting us in the mood, tingles with anticipation of the Big Bang that the movie's expert technique must be priming it for. In the second hour, McTiernan, who's conscientious and hardworking, supplies one climax after another, and although he doesn't quite make the earth move, you can't fault his effort. What's appealing about the "Die Hard" series is that the movies devote vast amounts of money and manpower to giving the viewer an experience that's entirely free of redeeming social significance. They never suggest that they're offering anything more than an evening of intense, meaningless thrills, and even if you regret the whole affair in the morning, the obvious trouble and expense that the movie has lavished on you allows you to salvage a little self-



Against all odds: Bruce Willis as a sweaty, blue-collar counterpart of James Bond.

JAIME HERNANDEZ



"Guess what—I'm back to being a liberal."

• •

respect: at least you don't feel cheap.

For consenting adults whose tastes run to this sort of huge, unrepentantly dumb action-movie hedonism, "Die Hard with a Vengeance" is pretty good value. The picture is sloppier and more erratic than the original "Die Hard" (1988), also directed by McTiernan, in which the action was confined mostly to a single setting—a high-rise L.A. office building seized by Eurosleaze terrorists. And although Irons is funny and menacing, his creepiness is a shade less delightful than Alan Rickman's was in the first picture. But No. 3 is still a lot snappier than "Die Hard 2" (1990), directed by Renny Harlin, which was loud, logy, and diffuse—so unfocussed that it's tough even to remember what blew up in it. And "Die Hard with a Vengeance" has its share of nifty sequences: McClane's reckless drive downtown in the yellow cab is hilariously scary, which is to say that it captures precisely the sensation of a typical New York taxi ride; and there's a terrifically tense shoot-out in a closed elevator. The most preposterous set piece, in which McClane chases the bad guys through an aqueduct, escalates to a pleasing cartoonlike absurdity and ends with a fine sight gag: the hero spewed from beneath the ground as if from the belly of an angry whale, and deposited in a mud puddle at the edge of the Saw Mill River Parkway.

The problem with action-movie franchises like the "Die Hard" series, though, is that it's difficult to keep viewers satisfied by giving them exactly the same movie every time, yet it's risky to deviate too much from a proven formula. In the absence of a truly distinctive sensibility (such as that of the James Bond films or Tim Burton's two "Batman" pictures), producers tend to settle for a cautious corporate-diversification strategy. Using the most reliable element of their product's appeal—in this case (and most others), the star's personality—as a kind of soup stock, they gradually add other ingredients lifted from other series' recipes. That's why the original "Die Hard," which seemed utterly shameless seven years ago, can now look like a model of formal control, a classical norm that this new, improved, adulterated version makes us feel a tiny bit nostalgic for. The aqueduct sequence, although it's enjoyable, is essentially something out of an Indiana Jones picture. McClane's face-to-face confrontation with Simon, aboard a cargo ship crawling with armed henchmen, is reminiscent of a Bond-movie climax, in which the hero infiltrates the villain's lair and creeps stealthily through narrow passageways, eliminating bulky sentries as he goes. Even in the original, McClane seemed to have been conceived as a sweaty, blue-collar American counterpart of Bond. His role is the same—to foul up the schemes of world-class megalomaniacs—but his style is different: beer instead of dry Martinis; obscene wisecracks instead of arched-eyebrow witticisms; dirty undershirt instead of black tie. "Die Hard with a Vengeance" just takes the Bond influence to the next level of blatancy.

And this "Die Hard" also gives Willis a black co-star—Samuel L. Jackson, as a Harlem shopkeeper named Zeus, who begins as an innocent bystander but quickly graduates to sidekick. Jackson brings a lot to the party, and Willis is obviously energized by his presence, but their black-and-white buddy routines, mixing mutual exasperation, light racial antagonism, and soldierly bonding, are mighty familiar—from "48 Hrs." and its sequel, from "The Last Boy Scout" (in which Willis, in a sort of dry run for "Die Hard with a Vengeance," traded quips with Damon Wayans), and, preëminently, from the "Lethal Weapon" movies. If this picture is any indication, the ultimate fate of all action-movie series may be to become perfectly indistinguishable from one another. "Die Hard with a Vengeance" is passable fun, but even those of us who enjoy violent, splashy action pictures may be getting jaded by now. When it's all over, and you've lit up your cigarette outside the theatre, you may have some trouble putting a name or a face to the movie that just had its way with you. "Die Hard," "Lethal Weapon," "Goldfinger"—what's the difference? At a certain point, they all look the same in the dark.

ALFONSO CUARÓN'S "A Little Princess," based on a novel and a play by Frances Hodgson Burnett (who also wrote "The Secret Garden"), is a wonderful surprise. Most classic stories for children—especially the ones for girls—teach the lesson that the imagination is the glory of childhood and should be cultivated. In a way, that message seems more useful for grownups than for kids, who, as a rule, don't have to be *told* to dream and to fantasize and to make up stories; adults, however, sometimes need a swift, sharp kick to remind them that their children's inner lives don't need to be as dreary and constricted as their own. The beauty of Burnett's story (the novel, which was published in 1905, is an expanded version of an 1888 novella) is that it presents the battle of youthful fancy against adult "realism" as a kind of epic struggle, fought where it is usually fought—in school. The young heroine, Sara Crewe (Liesel Matthews), is a bright, happy, exuberantly creative girl who has the misfortune to be deposited in a boarding school whose headmistress, Miss Minchin (Eleanor Bron), is an implacable enemy of everything that Sara innocently values. Miss Minchin is an alarming, and all too familiar, representative of the lean-and-mean practicality of the adult world. She's more than just a strict disciplinarian; she's a ruthless downsizer of children's imaginations. "A Little Princess" is a fantasy based on a grim truth—that many grownups actually resent the playful freedom of kids' minds, and do their damnedest to stamp the creative fires out.

Movies for children always pay lip service to the joys of the imagination but almost never embody them. Usually, the fantastic adventures and the candy-colored dream worlds that filmmakers cook up for the ostensible purpose of delighting youngsters are in fact advancing the quintessentially adult agenda of making merchandisers' dreams come true. (See any recent Disney animated film.) In other cases, honorable intentions are undone by dullness and literal-mindedness, as in Agnieszka Holland's dutiful, faithful, and stubbornly unmagical "The Secret Garden" or Caroline Thompson's gruelling "Black Beauty." Cuarón's "A Little Princess" is the rare film for children that practices what it preaches. The screenwriters, Richard LaGravenese and Elizabeth Chandler, play with Burnett's story rather than merely illustrate it, and the changes they've made show their love for the material and their sympathy with the author's benevolent vision. The action, for instance, has been transposed from London to New York, without any loss of emotional resonance. Burnett's London evokes the grimy urban harshness at the front lines of the Industrial Revolution, but the movie's American setting works just as well, because it makes Miss Minchin's school seem a symbol of a suffocating Puritan sternness—a place where young brains are washed clean of pleasure and left with chilly pieties about hard work and petty thrift.

The change of venue also enables the filmmakers to alter, for the better, the meaning of the title. Sara begins as an affluent star pupil—her father's wealth initially guarantees good treatment from the greedy, obsequious headmistress—but then her family's fortune is apparently lost and Minchin turns her into a servant and makes her live in the attic. In the novel, the heroine's defense against this indignity is to imagine herself a princess—someone, that is, whose essential being is so pure and so exalted that she can rise above everything, and remain strong and kind and generous. This isn't, perhaps, the current interpretation of royalty's virtues, and even if it were, Sara's private aristocratic fantasy might make contemporary viewers slightly uncomfortable. The screenwriters cleverly—and aptly—give a democratic spin to the concept: the heroine's guiding principle, which she imparts to her schoolmates, is "*All* girls are little princesses."

That may sound a bit sticky, but the movie makes us believe it. The girls in "A Little Princess" are a marvellous bunch—rowdy and energetic and sometimes irritating. They aren't perfect little doll-like creatures; they're a group of odd, distinct human beings, and their princessy radiance isn't the serene emanation of moral goodness but the hot flush of reckless youthful enthusiasm. Even noble Sara doesn't seem too good to be true; Liesel Matthews has a lovely, warm presence, and her acting is miraculously unself-conscious. She's an ideal image of the enchanted ease of childhood, and a delicious contrast to Eleanor Bron, who is a superbly stiff-necked Miss Minchin—the immovable object against which the irresistible force of Sara's imagination contends. Bron looks hard and solid and lifeless, as if she were just part of the imposing structure of the school building—this woman is a real pillar of society. Cuarón keeps the action moving along briskly and unsentimentally toward the climax, in which, to our great satisfaction, Miss Minchin's walls come tumbling down around her and Sara's sturdily constructed dream world springs up in their place. "A Little Princess" is funny and lively and stirring, and kids, at least, should recognize it as their favorite kind of story: here children are rewarded for their spontaneity and adults are punished for their rigidity. In "A Little Princess," fantasy is the best revenge. ◆

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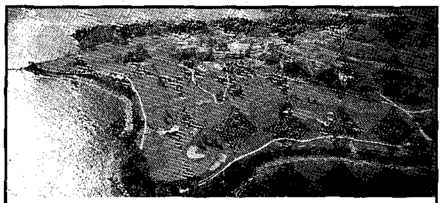

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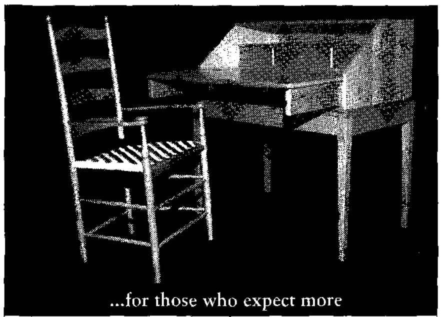

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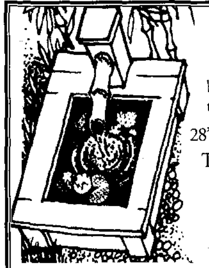

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MUSICAL EVENTS

EARTHQUAKE WEATHER

Adams goes pop in a sentimental Southern California tableau.

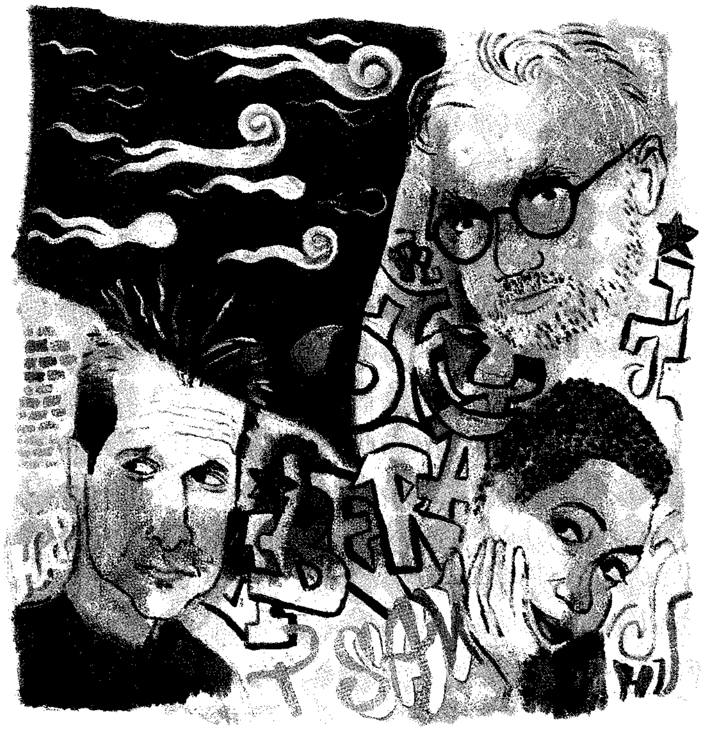
BY PAUL GRIFFITHS

JOHN ADAMS'S third full-length theatre work, "I Was Looking at the Ceiling and Then I Saw the Sky," which just opened in Berkeley and will come to Lincoln Center in July, is everything its predecessors were not. "Nixon in China" (1987) and "The Death of Klinghoffer" (1991) were on the grand scale; this is a little piece, one that tells its story through a sequence of songs for seven characters and an eight-piece rock band. With the change of form comes a change of nature. The size and sweep of the music in "Nixon" and "Klinghoffer" stood for history, a supreme tide driving people's lives for them. Nixon, in the opera, stepped out of the plane at Beijing Airport and sang about making history, while we, outside the opera, could hear how history was making him. Leon Klinghoffer strayed into history, thereby losing possession even of the moment of his death, which the opera dispersed along a temporal stream that had more to do with the circuitings of memory than with the current of experience. In both works, solemnity—another characteristic not shared by "I Was Looking at the Ceiling"—conveyed neither wisdom nor understanding but the hopeless impotence of individuals in the face of world events, which shaped themselves around those concerned. Tension—and this, too, is not much to be found in the new piece—came from the refusal of characters, and especially of women characters, to go with the flow. Alice Goodman's librettos for "Nixon" and "Klinghoffer" both ended with a kind of "Nunc dimittis," but in the second opera Adams cut that, and left us with Marilyn Klinghoffer's quietly fierce, certain defense of grief against world politics, of the individual against history.

That this defense should have to be voiced in a musical language rooted in American popular culture is one of the great ironies on which much of Adams's best work depends. We look for ways to express our deepest feelings and beliefs, our most personal passions, and what comes to mind is something that has been spun to millions of us on disks of silver plastic. The potency of cheap music isn't strange: impotent music could never sell well enough to be cheap. But the recognition that we're succumbing to commercial effectiveness may give us pause, and lead us to doubt whether we've truly found what speaks for us utterly. That doubt and, at the same time, the persuasiveness of popular music seem to be felt by the most self-aware characters in Adams's earlier operas. Marilyn Klinghoffer, Pat Nixon, and Chou En-lai all appear to share the composer's own mixed feelings, expressed in the mingled mockery and affection with which he treats his vernacular sources. Many of his concert pieces, too, thoroughly enjoy what they send up: the thudding basses of rock and the Hollywood sunset tune in "Grand Pianola Music," the squirrelling signals of cartoon music in the Chamber Symphony. To be a satirist is, for Adams, also to be a sentimentalist.

This is where "I Was Looking at the Ceiling" most decisively breaks with the past. Satire attenuates; sentimentality triumphs. There's a dismaying absence of care. The seven characters of the new piece, all of them under the age of twenty-six and living in contemporary Los Angeles, aren't allowed the solidity of uncertainty, the absoluteness of second thoughts; they must deliver themselves wholly by and through the medium of popular song, whose charms are, in most of the numbers, not quoted and questioned but proudly displayed. And displayed well. Adams can do the torch song. ("Alone" is waiting for Barbra

Streisand.) He can do the Motown sirens' trio. He can do rap; he can do gospel; he can do what he likes. So why can he not do himself?



L.A. story: John Adams (top), Peter Sellars, and June Jordan.

JOSH GOSFIELD

As the piece begins, it infuriates by repeatedly showing the possibility of musical enrichment and then changing its mind. The short overture is a distinctively Adamsish machine of interlocking ostinatos, here with a pentatonic clang of gamelan, and this kind of music continues into the opening ensemble, with its catchy and cunning setting of the title. The words "I was looking at the ceiling and then I saw the sky"—captured from one who lived through the 1994 Los Angeles earthquake—brilliantly convey a shock to the system and a shock of awareness: the two shocks that are suggested by the subtitle, "Earthquake/Romance," given to the piece by its librettist, June Jordan. The title is also a neat poetic line—a pair of Ionics succeeded by three iambs—whose rhythm Adams makes useful to his music: the Ionics dodge the music's strong beats; the iambs welcome them. So the music emphasizes the subtext of refocussing. But then the first solo number, for the preacher David, suddenly loses all sophistication. Intelligence comes back with the next piece, which is a comic duet for Consuelo, an illegal immigrant from El Salvador, and the contraception counsellor Leila, who tries to discourage her enthusiasm for babies. Here, though, the intelligence is in the instrumental backing—reminiscent, in its busy Nancarrowish motifs, of the opening movement of the Chamber Symphony—and not the voices. After this, we bump back to simplicity in Dewain's engaging introduction of himself as a young black man walking in sunlight. Then Consuelo's song, "Dónde estás?," is a lament complicated by weird harmonic venturings over a quasi-Baroque accompaniment of oscillating sixteenth notes played on guitar.

As the piece goes on, so the density of musically interesting items declines. Five of the twenty-five numbers are spoken—including, most crucially, the last—and the band is left to improvise in the earthquake. Perhaps these patches will be polished up before the production reaches New York, but only the most radical reconception could touch the basic problem, which is that the characters are cast adrift on the thin waters of popular song—and of popular song that belongs more to a composer born in 1947 than it can to twentysomethings. At those rare moments when the vocal writing becomes more ambitious, the effect is not to deepen expression but to frustrate it, which is only partly because the young singing actors who perform the piece, though all highly personable, don't have the musical equipment to deal with intricate rhythms or unusual intervals; more fundamentally, the score goes so close to Broadway that it can't draw back, and its modifications of popular style come across as tricks and curlicues rather than as springs of irony or richer expression. These are show people.

They can't, therefore, tell us very much about the lives of real undocumented immigrants, petty thieves, Vietnamese-American attorneys, news reporters, contraception counsellors, Baptist ministers, or cops. Where the piece succeeds, it does so most often as entertainment, as in the women's salute to the male body or the guys' responding homage to "the sweet majority population of the world"—both of which numbers, significantly, have nothing to do with the characters or their drama. Elsewhere, the work's laudable intentions to address political actuality are grossly compromised by the musical style. If sentimentality is the name of the game, then even Consuelo's awakening to the plight of her homeland and Dewain's resolution to study for law school are sentimental. There's nothing in the score on which such personal reëvaluations—such glimpses of skies through ceilings—might be founded. Nor does the music have any way of dealing with the acutely embarrassing and desperately long scene, reaching depths that will need a new breed of bathoscaphe to plumb, where the cop and his juvenile girlfriend decide maybe he's gay. Beyond all that, a critique of America—"This country! It doesn't want you and it doesn't want me!" Consuelo sings to Dewain in what has to be regarded as the clinching number—comes oddly from characters whose whole musical being bespeaks acceptance of the American dream. Alienation can't be expressed by those who sing from home.

Peter Sellars's contribution to the project is bizarre. This must be the first of his productions in which the characters look just as you'd expect them to look, and behave just as you'd expect them to behave: like young theatre pros. Because they use handheld mikes, their status as entertainers is constantly before us. To that extent, the production is entirely honest to the material, and entirely contrary to what Mr. Sellars told me he was doing: giving a voice to people who don't have an opportunity to speak for themselves. I hope some of them do get a chance to speak about this romancing of them. As for me, I found more life in the banners onstage—one for each scene, painted by West Coast muralists with such pseudonyms as Krash II, Nerv, and Vyal—than in the songs and actions of the characters. I was looking for the feeling and then I saw them die. ♦

SHOUTS & MURMURS

YOUR FACE OR MINE

BY IAN FRAZIER

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FIRST thing every morning when I sit down to eat, I get in my breakfast's face. I violate the space of that breakfast—the dry cereal, one-per-cent skim, fruit juice, what have you—I really get loud with it. I tell it what I want it to do for me that day from a nutritional standpoint. Hey, I'm a New Yorker—my food doesn't give *me* ulcers, I give *it* ulcers. Then I eat it. I go at that breakfast one hundred per cent. And I don't care what you're havin', eggs over, hash browns, grits like they got down South (grits! what a joke!), my breakfast can kick whatever you're havin' 's ass. It's not what's on the plate, it's the attitude. With the right New York attitude, I can take my breakfast and beat your breakfast, then take your breakfast and beat my breakfast.

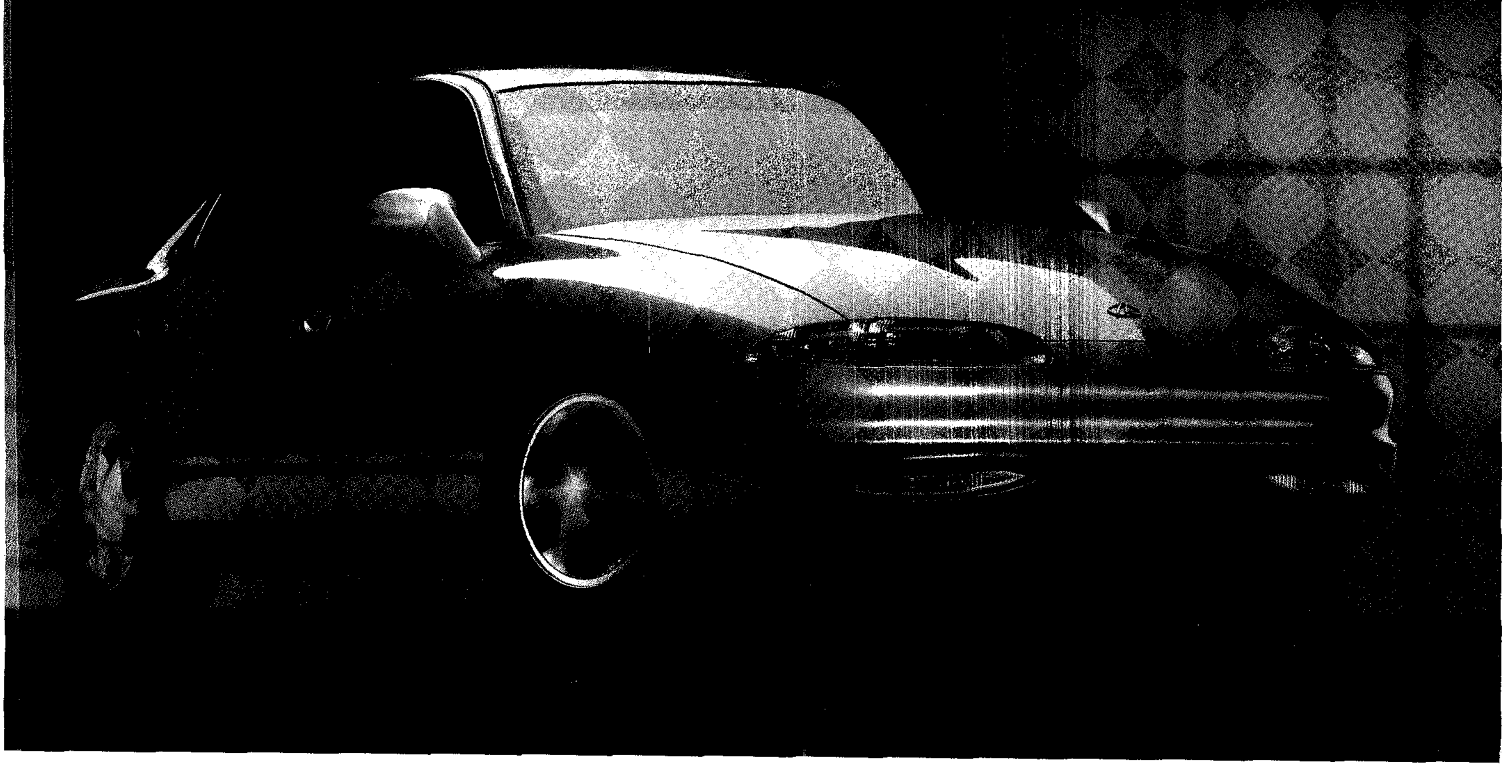
A word of warning here, in case you're thinking that because I get in my breakfast's face you can just come up and get in *my* face. Think twice about that, my friend. You want to get in my face, take a number. Let me explain: I'm a New Yorker, so naturally I'm not going to hear you unless you get in my face. In fact, I restrict myself exclusively to in-your-face people, places, and things, because that's the way I like it. Unfortunately, there's just one problem. Recently, I measured my face, and I don't think I've got more than about seventy square inches of surface area there. Think about it: not a lot of room. The *News* gets in my face every morning, and that more than fills my face right there. So I guess, loving this ass-kicking city as I do, what I really need is a hell of a lot bigger face.

The other day, I went ballistic, which I like to do. We—some fellow New Yorkers and I—were out kicking some other cities' asses. We started in Jersey, on the bank of the Hudson, and worked our way south. First we kicked Englewood's ass, then we kicked Englewood Cliffs' ass, then Fort Lee's ass, then Ridgefield's ass. I mean, we were taking no prisoners. Suddenly, I got distracted, and as we were kicking the ass of North Bergen I inadvertently took some prisoners. Dumb mistake. Now I got all these prisoners chained to the fence in the twenty-four-hour parking lot across the street. It so happens that my friend Bill lives, or lived, in North Bergen. Now the guy is yelling at me from the lot every morning, "So, you kicked our city's ass! Big deal! In New York, you got—what?—eight, nine million people? In North Bergen we got forty-eight thousand four hundred and fourteen, counting my wife and me. How fair is that?" He just doesn't understand. I don't care about fair. Fair is for horseshoes and hand grenades, whatever that means. I don't play nothin' I can't win, and I don't win nothin' I can't etc. Help me out, here, Shirley!

Luckily for me and others, I work as hard as I play. Weekdays, I'm all business. But come Friday I strip off the coat and tie and Merry Widow waist-cincher corset, and change into a baggy sweatshirt, jeans, and heels. Then it's down to the playground for an arms-and-elbows game of big-city asphalt-court basketball. In my game, there are two rules: (1) No blood, no foul; and (2) It's not over till the other guys lose. Which, to be up front about it, they always do. I drive on my opponents, I fake them out of their shoes, I stuff them like a Christmas turkey. My game's butter and they're toast, and the only way they're ever going to check me is if they check my groceries at A. & P. If they are smaller and weaker than I am, I flatten them, but if they are my size or bigger—hey, I'm not too proud to back off. I sort of shuffle and bow down, sometimes all the way to their sneaker tops, to let them know I'm making a sincere effort here. Afterward, in my apartment, suddenly something comes over me and I kick my own ass. Hey, it happens, it's nothing I can help. My doctor says it's a medical condition. Unlike most people, due to my specific metabolism, I do need the aggravation. *Kick! Ouch! Kick! Ouch!* I'm writhing around like a carp here. But I'm a New Yorker: I scream and I yell, but then I hug and I kiss. My foot says it's sorry, and makes up with my ass, and my ass accepts the apology, and we all go out for coffee and Danish. I eat standing at the counter in the toughest city in the world. ♦

KAREN CALDICOTT

There are larger works of art. But none that hang so well on turns.



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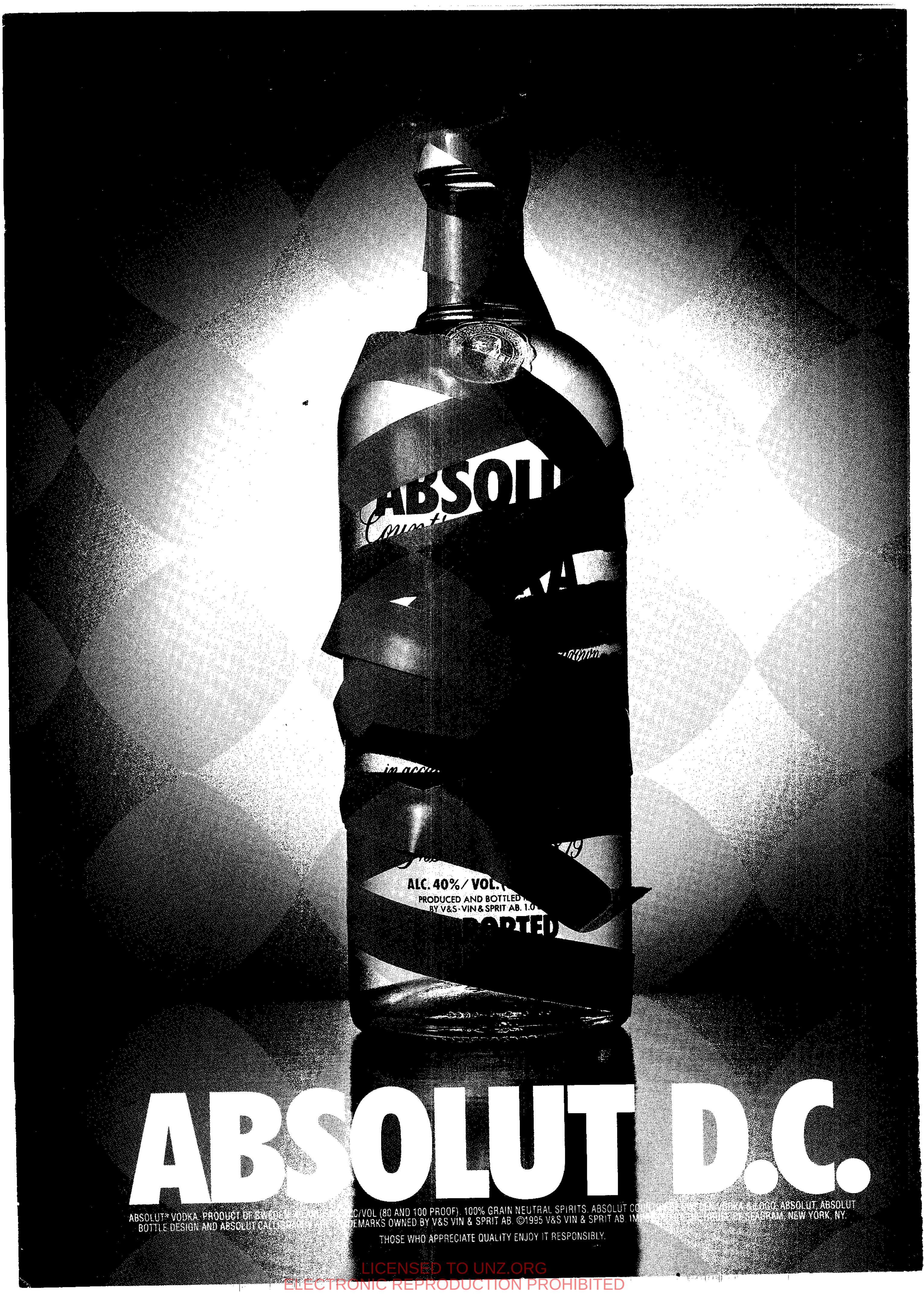
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